"ALL THE TEY MAGIC . . . SUPERB!" - San Francisco Chronicle

JOSEPHINE TEY

THEMAN

INTHE



QUEUE

1-Murder

It was between seven and eight o'clock on a March evening, and all over London the bars were being drawn back from pit and gallery doors. Bang, thud, and clank. Grim sounds to preface an evening's amusement. But no last trump could have so galvanized the weary attendants on Thespis and Terpsichore standing in patient column of four before the gates of promise. Here and there, of course, there was no column. At the Irving, five people spread themselves over the two steps and sacrificed in warmth what they gained in comfort; Greek tragedy was not popular. At the Playbox there was no one; the Playbox was exclusive, and ignored the existence of pits. At the Arena, which had a three weeks' ballet season, there were ten persons for the gallery and a long queue for the pit. But at the Woffington both human strings tailed away apparently into infinity. Long ago a lordly official had come down the pit queue and, with a gesture of his outstretched arm that seemed to guillotine hope, had said, "All after here standing room only." Having thus, with a mere contraction of his deltoid muscle, separated the sheep from the goats, he retired in Olympian state to the front of the theatre, where beyond the glass doors there was warmth and shelter. But no one moved away from the long line. Those who were doomed to stand for three hours more seemed indifferent to their martyrdom. They laughed and chattered, and passed each other sustaining bits of chocolate in torn silver paper. Standing room only, was it? Well, who would not stand, and be pleased to, in the last week of Didn't You Know? Nearly two years it had run now, London's own musical comedy, and this was its swan song. The stalls and the circle had been booked up weeks ago, and many foolish virgins, not used to queues, had swelled the waiting throng at the barred doors because bribery and corruption had proved unsuccessful at the box office. Every soul in London, it seemed, was trying to crowd into the Woffington to cheer the show just once again. To see if Golly Gollan had put a new gag into his triumph of foolery—Gollan who had been rescued from a life on the road by a daring manager, and had been given his chance and had taken it. To sun themselves yet once more in the loveliness and sparkle of Ray Marcable, that comet that two years ago had blazed out of the void into the zenith and had dimmed the known and constant stars. Ray danced like a blown leaf, and her link aloof smile had killed the fashion for dentifrice advertisements in six months. "Her indefinable charm," the critics called it, but her followers called it many extravagant things, and defined it to each other with handwavings and facial contortions when words proved inadequate to convey the whole of her faery quality. Now she was going to America, like all the good things, and after the last two years London without Ray Marcable would be an unthinkable desert. Who would not stand forever just to see her once more?

It had been drizzling since five o'clock, and every now and then a light chill air lifted the drizzle and half playfully swept the queue from end to end with it in one long brushstroke. That discouraged no one—even the weather could not take itself seriously tonight; it had merely sufficient tang to provide a suitable apéritif to the fare in front of them. The queue twiddled its toes, and Cockneywise made the most of whatever entertainment provided itself in the dark canyon of the lane. First there had come the newsboys, small things with thin, impassive faces and wary eyes. They had flickered down the queue like wildfire and disappeared, leaving behind a trail of chatter and fluttering papers. Then a man with legs shorter than his body laid a ragged strip of carpet on the damp pavement and proceeded to tie himself into knots until he looked as a spider does when it is taken unawares, his mournful toad's eyes gleaming now and then from totally unexpected places, in the writhing mass, so that even the most indifferent spectator felt his spine trickle. He was succeeded by a man who played popular airs on the fiddle, happily oblivious of the fact that his E string was half a tone flat. Then, simultaneously, came a singer of sentimental ballads and a syncopated orchestra of three. After they had scowled at each other for a moment or two, the soloist tried to rush things on the possession-being-nine-points principle, by breaking into a wailing Because You Came to Me, but the leader of the orchestra, handing his guitar to a lieutenant, proceeded to interview the tenor, with his elbows out and his hands lifted. The tenor tried to ignore him by looking over his head, but found it difficult, because the musician was half a head taller than himself and appeared to be ubiquitous. He persevered for another two lines, and then the ballad wavered uncertainly into bitter expostulation in his natural voice, and two minutes later he faded up the dark alley, mumbling threats and complaints, and the orchestra broke into the latest dance tune. This being more to the taste of the moderns than inappropriate resurrection of decayed sentiment, they promptly forgot all about the poor victim of force majeure, and twiddled their toes in time to the lively measure. After the orchestra, and severally, came a conjurer, an evangelist, and a man who allowed himself to be tied up in a rope with imposinglooking knots, and as imposingly worked himself free.

All these did their little turn and moved on to another performance elsewhere, and each one before leaving made a tour of the line, thrusting limp but importunate headgear into the meagre interstices of the queue, and saying, "Thank you! Thank you!" as encouragement to the bountiful. By way of punctuation to the programme, there had been vendors of sweetmeats, vendors of matches, vendors of toys, vendors even of picture post cards. And the crowd had parted good-naturedly with their pence and found amusement sufficient to their needs.

Now a shudder ran down the line—a shudder that the experienced recognized as but one thing. Stools were given up or folded into handbags, food disappeared, purses appeared. The doors were open. The lovely exciting gamble had begun. Was it to be win, place, or lose by the time they came to the wicket? Up in the front of the queue where the order was less mathematically two-and-two than down in the open, the excitement of the door-opening had for a moment or two overcome the habitual place-keeping instincts of the Englishman—I say Englishman advisedly; the Scot has none of it—and there had been a mild pushing and readjustment before the queue had become immobile in a wedged and short-breathing mass before the *guichet*, which was immediately inside the pit door. The clink and rattle of coin on brass proclaimed the continual hurried transactions which made the lucky ones free of paradise. The very sound of it made those behind strain forward unconsciously until the crowd in front protested as audibly as their crushed lungs permitted, and a policeman went down the queue to remonstrate. "Now then, now then, stand back a bit. There's plenty of time. You won't get in by pushing. All in good time." Now and then the whole line tottered forward a few inches as the emancipated ones ran in twos and threes from the head of it, like beads rolling from a broken string. Now a fat woman held them up by fumbling in her bag for more money. Surely the fool could have found out before now the exact amount required instead of keeping them back like this. As if conscious of their hostility she turned to the man behind her and said angrily:

"'Ere, I'll thank you to stop shoving. Can't a lady be allowed to take out her purse without every one losing their manners?"

But the man she addressed took no notice. His head was sunk on his chest. Only the top of his soft hat met her beady indignant gaze. She snorted, and moving away from him to face the box office squarely laid down the money she had been searching for. And as she did so the man sank slowly to his knees, so that those behind almost fell over him, stayed like that for a moment, and then keeled still more slowly over on his face.

"Chap fainted," said some one. No one moved for a moment or two. Minding one's own business in a crowd today is as much an instinct of self-preservation as a chameleon's versatility. Perhaps some one would claim the chap. But no one did; and so a man with more social instinct or more self-importance than the rest moved forward to help the collapsed one. He was about to bend over the limp heap when he stopped as if stung and recoiled hastily. A woman shrieked three times, horribly; and the pushing, heaving queue froze suddenly to immobility.

In the white clear light of the naked electric in the roof, the man's body, left alone by the instinctive withdrawal of the others, lay revealed in every detail. And rising slantwise from the gray tweed of his coat was a little silver thing that winked wickedly in the baleful light.

It was the handle of a dagger.

Almost before the cry of "Police!" had gone up, the constable had come from his job of pacification at the other end of the queue. At the first of the woman's shrieks he had turned. No one shrieked like that except when faced by sudden death. Now he stood looking for a moment at the picture, bent over the man, turned his head gently to the light, released it, and said to the man at the *guichet*:

"Phone for the ambulance and the police."

He turned his rather shocked gaze on the queue.

"Any one here know the gentleman?"

But no one claimed acquaintance with the still thing on the floor.

Behind the man there had been a prosperous suburban couple. The woman was moaning continuously and without expression, "Oh, let's go home, Jimmy! Oh, let's go home!" On the opposite side of the *guichet* stood the fat woman, arrested by this sudden horror, grasping her ticket in her black cotton gloves but making no effort to secure a seat now that the way lay open to her. Down the waiting line behind, the news went like fire in stubble—a man had been murdered! and the crowd in the sloping vestibule began to mill suddenly in hopeless confusion as some tried to get away from the thing that had spoiled all thought of entertainment, and some tried to push forward to see, and some indignant ones fought to keep the place they had stood so many hours for.

"Oh, let's go home, Jimmy! Oh, let's go home!"

Jimmy spoke for the first time. "I don't think we can, old girl, until the police decide whether they want us or not."

The constable heard him and said, "You're quite right there. You can't go. You first six will stay where you are—and you, missus," he added to the fat woman. "The rest come on." And he waved them on as he would wave the traffic past a broken-down car.

Jimmy's wife broke into hysterical sobbing, and the fat woman expostulated. She had come to see the show and didn't know anything about the man. The four People behind the suburban couple were equally reluctant to be mixed up in a thing they knew nothing about, with results that no one could foresee. They too protested their ignorance.

"Maybe," said the policeman, "but you'll have to explain all that at the station. There's nothing to be scared of," he added for their comfort, and rather unconvincingly in the circumstances.

So the queue came on. The doorkeeper brought a green curtain from somewhere and covered up the body. The automatic clink and rattle of coin began again and went on, indifferent as rain. The doorkeeper, moved from his habitual Jovian abstraction by their plight or by the hope of reward, offered to keep their rightful seats for the seven derelicts. Presently came the ambulance and the police from Gowbridge Police Station. An inspector had a short interview with each of the detained seven, took names and addresses, and dismissed them with a warning to be ready to come up if called upon. Jimmy took his sobbing wife away to a taxi, and the other five straggled soberly into the seats over which the door-keeper was brooding, just as the curtain rose on the evening performance of *Didn't You Know?*

2—Inspector Grant

Superintendent Barker applied a carefully manicured forefinger to the ivory bell-push on the under side of his table, and kept it there until a minion appeared.

"Tell Inspector Grant that I want to see him," he said to the minion, who was doing his best to look obsequious in the great man's presence, but was frustrated in his good intention by an incipient embonpoint which compelled him to lean back a little in order to preserve his balance, and by the angle of his nose which was the apotheosis of impudence. Bitterly conscious of failure, the minion withdrew to deliver the message and to bury the memory of his confusion among the unsympathetic perfection of files and foolscap from which he had been summoned, and presently Inspector Grant came into the room and greeted his chief cheerily as one man to another. And his chief's face brightened unconsciously in his presence.

If Grant had an asset beyond the usual ones of devotion to duty and a good supply of brains and courage, it was that the last thing he looked like was a police officer. He was of medium height and slight in build, and he was—now, if I say dapper, of course you will immediately think of something like a tailor's dummy, something perfected out of all individuality, and Grant is most certainly not that; but if you can visualize a dapperness that is not of the tailor's dummy type, then that is Grant. Barker had for years striven unsuccessfully to emulate his subordinate's chic; he succeeded merely in looking too carefully dressed. He lacked the flair for things sartorial as he lacked flair in most things. He was a plodder. But that was the worst that could be said about him. And when he started plodding after some one, that some one usually wished he had never been born.

He regarded his subordinate now with an admiration untinged with any resentment, appreciated his son-of-the-morning atmosphere—he himself had been awake most of the night with sciatica—and came to business.

"Gowbridge are very sick," he said. "In fact, Gow Street went so far as to insinuate that it was a conspiracy."

"Oh? Some one been pulling their legs?"

"No, but last night's affair is the fifth big thing in their district in the last three days, and they're fed up. They want us to take this last affair over."

"What is that? The theatre-queue business, is it?"

"Yes, and you are O.C. investigations. So get busy. You can have Williams. I want Barber to go down to Berkshire about that Newbury burglary. The locals down there will want a lot of soft soap because we have been called in, and Barber is better at that than Williams. I think that is all. Better get down to Gow Street right away. Good luck."

Half an hour later Grant was interviewing the Gowbridge police surgeon. Yes, the surgeon said, the man had been dead when he was brought into hospital. The weapon was a thin, exceedingly sharp stiletto. It had been driven into the man's back on the left side of the backbone with such force that the hilt had pressed his garments to a wad which had kept any blood from flowing. What had escaped had oozed out round the wound without coming to the outer surface at all. In his opinion the man had been stabbed a considerable time—perhaps ten minutes or more—before he had collapsed as the people in front moved away. In a squash like that he would be held up and moved along by the crowd. In fact, it would have been a sheer impossibility to fall if one had wanted to in such a closely packed mob. He thought it highly unlikely that the man was even aware that he had been struck. So much pressing and squeezing and involuntary hurting went on on these occasions that a sudden and not too painful blow would not be noticed.

"And about the person who stabbed him? Anything peculiar about the stabbing?"

"No, except that the man was strong and left-handed."

"Not a woman?"

"No, it would need more strength than a woman has to drive the blade in as it has been driven. You see, there was no room for a backsweep of the arm. The blow had to be delivered from a position of rest. Oh no, it was a man's work. And a determined man's, too."

"Can you tell me anything about the dead man himself?" asked Grant, who liked to hear a scientific opinion on any subject.

"Not much. Well nourished—prosperous, I should say."

"Intelligent?"

"Yes, very, I should think."

"What type?"

"What type of occupation, do you mean?"

"No, I can deduce that for myself. What type of—temperament, I suppose you'd call it?"

"Oh, I See." The surgeon thought for a moment. He looked doubtfully at his interlocutor. "Well, no one can say that for a certainty —you understand that?" And when Grant had acknowledged the qualification: "but I should call him one of the 'lost cause' type." He raised his eyebrows interrogatively at the inspector and, assured of his understanding, added, "He had practical enough qualities in his face, but his hands were a dreamer's. You'll see for yourself."

Together they viewed the body. It was that of a young man of twenty-nine or thirty, fair-haired, hazel-eyed, slim, and of medium height. The hands, as the doctor had pointed out, were long and slim and not used to manual work. "Probably stood a lot," said the surgeon with a glance at the man's feet. "And walked with his left toe turned in."

"Do you think his assailant had any knowledge of anatomy?" asked Grant. It was almost incredible that so small a hole had let a man's life out.

"It wasn't done with the precision of a surgeon, if that's what you mean. As for a knowledge of anatomy, practically every one who is old enough to have lived through the war has a working knowledge of anatomy. It may have been just a lucky shot—and I rather think it was."

Grant thanked him and came to business with the Gow Street officials. On the table were laid out the scanty contents of the man's pockets. Grant was conscious of a faint dismay when he saw their fewness. A white cotton handkerchief, a small pile of loose change (two half-crowns, two sixpences, a shilling, four pennies, and a halfpenny), and—unexpected—a service revolver. The handkerchief

was well worn but had no laundry mark or initial. The revolver was fully loaded.

Grant examined them in a disgusted silence. "Laundry marks on his clothes?" he asked.

No, there were no marks of any kind.

And no one had come to claim him? Not even any one to make inquiries?

No, no one but that old madwoman who laid claim to every one the police found.

Well, he would see the clothes for himself. Painstakingly he examined each article of clothing. Both hat and shoes were well worn, the shoes so much so that the maker's name, which should have been on the lining, had been obliterated. The hat when new had been bought from a firm who owned shops all over London and the provinces. Both were good of their kind, and though well worn neither was shabby. The blue suit was fashionable if rather too pronounced in cut, and the same might be said of the grey overcoat. The man's linen was good if not expensively so, and the shirt was of a popular shade. All the clothes, in fact, had belonged to a man who either took an interest in clothes or was accustomed to the society of those who did. A salesman in a men's outfitter's, perhaps. As the Gowbridge people had said, there were no laundry marks. That meant either that the man had wanted to hide his identity or that his linen was washed habitually at home. Since there was no sign of any obliteration of marks it followed that the latter was the reasonable explanation. On the other hand, the tailor's name had been deliberately removed from the suit. That and the scantiness of the man's belongings pointed certainly to a desire on his part to conceal his identity.

Lastly—the dagger. It was a wicked little weapon in its viperish slenderness. The handle was of silver, about three inches long, and represented the figure of some saint, bearded and robed. Here and there it was touched with enamel in bright primitive colours such as adorn sacred images in Catholic countries. In general it was of a type fairly common in Italy and along the south coast of Spain. Grant handled it gingerly.

"How many people have had their hands on it?" he asked.

The police had commandeered it as soon as the man had arrived in hospital and it could be removed. No one had touched it since. But the expression of satisfaction was wiped from Grant's face when the information was added that it had been tested for fingerprints and had been found blank. Not even a blurred one spoiled the shining surface of the smug saint.

"Well," said Grant, "I'll take these and get on." He left instructions with Williams to take the dead man's fingerprints and to have the revolver examined for peculiarities. To his own sight it seemed to be an exceedingly ordinary service revolver of a type which since the war has been as common in Britain as grandfather clocks. But, as has been said, Grant liked to hear authorities on their own subject. He himself took a taxi and spent the rest of the day interviewing the seven persons who had been nearest the unknown when he collapsed the previous night.

As the taxi bore him hither and thither he let his thought play round and over the situation. He had not the faintest hope that these people he interviewed would be of use to him. They had one and all denied any knowledge of the man when first questioned, and they were not likely to alter their minds as to that now. Also, if any of there had seen a companion with the dead man previously, or had noticed anything suspicious, they would have been only too ready to say so. It was Grant's experience that ninety-nine people proffered useless information where one was silent. Again, the surgeon had said that the man had been stabbed some time before it had been noticed, and no assassin was going to stay in the immediate neighborhood of his victim until the deed was discovered. Even if the possibility of a bluff had occurred to the murderer, the chances of a connexion between himself and his victim being established were too good to allow a sensible man—and a man bent on self-preservation is usually shrewd enough—to indulge in it. No, the man who did it had left the queue some time before. He must find some one who had noticed the murdered man before his death and had seen him in converse with some one. There was, of course, the possibility to be faced that there had been no converse, that the murderer had merely taken up a place behind his victim and slipped away when the thing was done. In that case he had to find some one who had seen a man leave the queue. That should not be difficult. The Press could be called to help.

Idly he considered the type of man it would be. No thorough Englishman used such a weapon. If he used steel at all he took a razor and cut a person's throat. But his habitual weapon was a bludgeon, and, failing that, a gun. This was a crime that had been planned with an ingenuity and executed with a subtlety that was foreign to an Englishman's habit of thought. The very femininity of it proclaimed the Levant, or at the very least one used to Levantine habits of life. A sailor perhaps. An English sailor used to the Mediterranean ports might have done it. But then, would a sailor have been likely to think of anything so subtle as the queue? He would have been more likely to wait for a dark night and a lonely street. The picturesqueness of the thing was Levantine. An Englishman was obsessed with the desire to hit. The manner of the hitting did not habitually concern him.

That made Grant think of motive, and he considered the more obvious ones: theft, revenge, jealousy, fear. The first was ruled out; the man's pockets could have been picked half a dozen times by an expert practitioner in such a crowd, without any more violence than a fly bestows in alighting. Revenge or jealousy? Most probably—Levantines were notoriously vulnerable in their feelings; an insult rankled for a lifetime, a straying smile on the part of their adored, and they ran amok. Had the man with the hazel eyes—he had, undoubtedly, been attractive—come between a Levantine and his girl?

For no reason whatever Grant did not think so. He did not for a moment lose sight of the possibility, but—he did not think so. There remained fear. Was the fully loaded revolver prepared for the man who slid that sliver of steel into the owner's back? Had the dead man intended to shoot the Levantine on sight, and had the assassin known it and lived in terror? Or was it the other way about? Was it the dead man who had carried a weapon of defense which had not availed him? But then there was the unknown man's desire to slough his identity. A loaded revolver in these circumstances pointed to suicide. But if he contemplated suicide, why postpone it while he went to the play? What other motive induced a man to make himself anonymous? A brush with the police—arrest? Had he intended to shoot some one and, afraid of not getting away, made himself nameless? That was possible.

It was fairly safe, at least, to suppose that the dead man and the man whom Grant had mentally christened the Levantine had known each other sufficiently well to knock sparks from each other. Grant had very little belief in secret societies as the origins of picturesque murders. Secret societies delighted in robbery and blackmail and all the more squalid methods of getting something for nothing, and there was seldom anything picturesque about them, as he knew from bitter experience. Moreover, there were no impressive secret societies in London at present, and he hoped they would not start. Murder to order bored him stiff. What interested him was the

possible play of mind on mind, of emotion on emotion. Like the Levantine and the unknown. Well, he must do his best to find out who the Unknown was—that would give him a line on the Levantine. Why had no one claimed him? It was early yet, of course. He might be recognized by some one at any minute. After all, he had only been "missing" to his people for the space of a night, and not many people rush to see a murdered man because their son or brother has stayed out for the night.

With patience and consideration and an alert mind, Grant interviewed the seven people he had set out to see quite literally to see. He had not anticipated receiving information from them directly, but he wanted to see them for himself and to sum them up. He found them all going about their various business with the exception of Mrs. James Ratcliffe, who was prostrate in bed and being attended by the doctor, who deplored the nervous shock she had received. Her sister—a charming girl with hair the colour of honey—talked to Grant. She had come into the drawing-room quite obviously hostile to the thought of any police officer being admitted to her sister in her present state. The sight of the police officer in reality was so astonishing that she looked again at his card quite involuntarily, and Grant smiled inwardly a little more broadly than he permitted himself outwardly.

"I know you hate the sight of me," he said apologetically—and the tone was not wholly acting—"but I wish you would let me talk to your sister for just two minutes. You can stand outside the door with a stopwatch. Or come in, if you like, of course. There is nothing at all private in what I want to say to her. It's only that I am in charge of the investigations in this case, and it is my duty to see the seven people who were nearest the man last night. It will help me enormously if I can write them all off the slate tonight and start on fresh lines tomorrow. Don't you see? It's mere form but very helpful."

As he had hoped, this line of argument was a success. After a little hesitation the girl said, "Let me go and see if I can persuade her." Her report of the inspector's charms must have been a rose-coloured one, for she came back in less time than he had dared to hope and took him up to her sister's room, where he had an interview with a tearful woman who protested that she had not even noticed the man until he had fallen, and whose wet eyes regarded him continually with a dreadful curiosity. Her mouth was hidden behind a barricade of handkerchief which she kept pressed to it. Grant wished that she would take it down for a moment. He had a theory that mouths gave away more than eyes—certainly where women were concerned.

"Were you standing behind him when he fell?"

"Yes."

"And who was alongside him?"

She could not remember. No one was paying attention to anything but getting into the theatre, and in any case she never noticed people on the street.

"I'm sorry," she said shakily, when he was taking his departure. "I'd like to be of use if I could. I keep seeing that knife, and I'd do anything to have the man that did it arrested." And as Grant went out he dismissed her from his mind.

Her husband, whom he had to travel into the City to see—he could have had them all to the Yard, but he wanted to see how they were occupying their time on this the first day after the murder—was more helpful. There had been a fair amount of churning in the queue, he said, as the doors were opened, so that their relations with their neighbors had altered a bit. As far as he could remember, the person who had stood beside the dead man and in front of himself was a man who had belonged to a party of four in front of that again, and had gone in with them. He, like his wife, said that he had not consciously seen the man until he had fallen.

The other five Grant found equally innocent and equally unhelpful. None had noticed the man. That amazed Grant just a little. How had *no one* seen him? He must have been there all the time. One doesn't shove in at the head of a queue without attracting a most uncomfortable amount of attention. And even the most unobservant of people will recall what their eyes have seen even if they were unconscious of taking notice at the time. Grant was still puzzling when he got back to the Yard.

There he sent a notice to the Press which asked any one who had seen a man leave the queue to communicate with Scotland Yard. Also a full description of the dead man, and as much of the progress of the investigations as was to be given to the public. Then he summoned Williams and demanded an account of his stewardship. Williams reported that the dead man's fingerprints had been photographed according to instructions and sent up for investigation, but he was unknown to the police. No corresponding fingerprints were to be found among those betraying dockets. The revolver expert could find nothing individual about the revolver. It was probably second hand, had been used quite a lot, and was of course a very powerful weapon.

"Huh!" said Grant disgustedly. "Some expert!" and Williams smiled.

"Well, he did say there was nothing distinctive about it," he reminded.

And then he explained that before sending the revolver to the experts he had tested it for fingerprints, and finding quite a lot had had them photographed. He was now waiting, for the prints.

"Good man," said Grant, and went in to see the superintendent, carrying the Print of the dead man's fingertips with him. He gave Barker a précis of the day's events without adducing any theories about foreigners beyond remarking that it was a very un-English crime

"Precious unproductive kind of clues we've got," said Barker. "All except the dagger, and that's more like something out of a book than part of an honest-to-goodness crime."

"My sentiments exactly," said Grant. I wonder how many people will be in the Woffington queue tonight,' he added irrelevantly.

The knowledge of how Barker would have speculated on this fascinating question was lost forever to mankind by the entrance of Williams.

"Thee revolver prints, sir," he said succinctly, and laid them on the table. Grant picked them up with no great enthusiasm and compared them with the prints he had absentmindedly been carrying about. After a short time he stiffened to sudden interest as a pointer stiffens. There were five distinct prints and many incomplete ones, but neither the good prints nor the broken ones had been made by the dead man. Attached to the prints was a report from the fingerprint department. There was no trace of these prints in their records.

Back in his room Grant sat and thought. What did it mean, and of what value was the knowledge? Did the revolver not belong to the dead man? Borrowed, perhaps? But even if it had been borrowed there would surely have been some indication that the dead man had had it in his possession. Or had the dead man not had it in his possession? Had it been slipped into his pocket by some one else?

But one could not slip anything of the weight and bulk of a service revolver into a man's pocket unknown to him. *No*, not a living man, but—it could have been done after the knife-thrust. But why? Why? No solution, however far fetched, presented itself to him. He took the dagger out of its wrappings, and considered it through the microscope, but could mesmerize himself into no hopeful state over it. He was stale. He would go out and walk a bit. It was just after five. He would go down to the Woffington and see the man who had been doorkeeper at the pit last night.

It was a fine still evening with a primrose sky, and London was painted against it, in flat washes of a misty lavender. Grant sniffed the air appreciatively. Spring was coming. When he had run the Levantine to earth, he would wangle some leave—sick leave, if he couldn't get it any other way—and go fishing somewhere. Where should he go? You got the best fishing in the Highlands, but the company was apt to be darned dull. He would go fishing in the Test—at Stockbridge, perhaps. Trout were poor sport, but there was a snug little pub there, and the best of company. And he would get a horse to ride there, and turf to ride it on. And Hampshire in spring—1

So he speculated, walking briskly along the Embankment, on things far removed from the business on hand. For that was Grant's way. Barker's motto was: "Chew it over! Chew it over continually, sleeping and waking, and you'll find the kernel that matters." That was true for Barker but not for Grant. Grant had once retorted that when he had chewed to that extent he couldn't think of anything but the ache in his jaws, and he had meant it. When something baffled him he found that if he kept on worrying it, he got no further, and lost his sense of proportion in the process. So when he came to a dead stop he indulged in what he called "shutting his eyes" for a little, and when he "opened" them again he habitually found a new light on things that revealed unexpected angles and made the old problem a totally new proposition.

There had been a matinée that afternoon at the Woffington, but he found the theatre in its usual state of shrouded desolation in front and untidy dreariness behind. The doorkeeper was on the premises, but no one was very sure where he was to be found. In the early evening his duties were many and various, it seemed. After several panting messengers had returned from the bowels of the building with reports "No, sir, there wasn't a sign of him," Grant himself joined in the exploration and eventually ran the man to earth in a dim passage behind the stage. When Grant had explained who he was and what he wanted, the man became voluble in his pride and eagerness. He was used to being within hailing distance of the aristocracy of the stage, but it was not every day that he had the chance of conversing on friendly terms with that much more august being, an inspector from the C.I.D. He beamed, he continually altered the angle of his cap, he fingered his medal ribbons, he dried his palms on the seat of his trousers, and he quite obviously would have said that he had seen a monkey in the queue if it would have pleased the inspector. Grant groaned inwardly, but the part of himself that always stood aloof whatever he did—the looker-on part of him which he had in such abundance—thought appreciatively what a character the old boy was. With that providing for a hypothetical future which is second nature in a professional detective, he was taking a friendly farewell of so much devoted uselessness, when a charming voice said, "Why, it's Inspector Grant!" and he turned to see Ray Marcable in her outdoor things, and evidently on the way to her dressing-room.

"Are you looking for a job? I'm arraid you can't have even a walking-on part at this late hour." Her still small smile teased him and her grey eyes looked at him friendlily from under the slight droop of her lids. They had met a year previously over the theft of a fabulously expensive dressing-case which had been one of her richest admirers' gifts to her, and though they had not met again since she had evidently not forgotten him. In spite of himself he was flattered—even while the looker-on bit of him was aware of it and laughed. He explained his business in the theatre, and the smile faded from her face instantly.

"Ah, that poor man!" she said. "But here is another," she added immediately, laying a hand on his arm. "Have you been asking questions all the afternoon? Your throat must be very dry. Come and have a cup of tea in my room with me. My maid is there and she will make us some. We are packing up, you know. It is very sad after such a long time."

She led the way to her dressing-room, a place that was walled half with mirrors and half with wardrobes, and that looked more like a florist's shop than any apartment designed for human habitation. She indicated the flowers with a wave of her hand.

"My flat won't hold any more, so these have to stay here. The hospitals were very polite, but they said quite firmly that they had had as much as they could do with. And I can't very well say, 'No flowers,' as they do at funerals, without hurting people."

"It's the only thing most people can do," Grant said.

"Oh, yes, I know," she said. "I'm not ungrateful. Only overwhelmed."

When tea was ready she poured out for him, and the maid produced shortbread from a tin. As he was stirring his tea and she was pouring out her own his mind brought him up with a sudden jerk, as an inexperienced rider jabs at his horse's mouth when startled. *She was left-handed!*

"Great heavens!" he said to himself disgustedly. "It isn't that you deserve a holiday, it's that you need it. What did you want to italicize a statement like that for? How many left-handed people do you think there are in London? You're developing the queerest kind of nerves."

To break a silence and because it was the first thing that came into his head, he said, "You're left-handed."

"Yes," she said indifferently, as the subject deserved, and went on to ask him about his investigations. He told her as much as would appear in the morrow's press and described the knife, as being the most interesting feature of the case.

"The handle is a little silver saint with blue-and-red enamel decoration."

Something leaped suddenly in Ray Marcable's calm eyes.

"What?" she said involuntarily.

He was about to say, "You've seen one like it?" but changed his mind. He knew on the instant that she would say no, and that he would have given away the fact that he was aware that there was anything to be aware of. He repeated the description and she said:

"A saint! How quaint! And how inappropriate!—And yet, in a big undertaking like a crime, I suppose you'd want some one's blessing on it."

Cool and sweet she put out her left hand for his cup, and as she replenished it he watched her steady wrist and impassive manner and wondered if this too could be unreasonableness on his part.

"Certainly not," said his other self. "You may be suffering from attacks of flair in queer places, but you haven't got to the stage of

imagining things yet."

They discussed America, which Grant knew well and to which she was about to make her first visit, and when he took his leave he was honestly grateful to her for the tea. He had forgotten all about tea. Now it wouldn't matter how late he had dinner. But as he went out he sought a light for his cigarette from the doorkeeper, and in the course of another ebullition of chatter and good will learned that Miss Marcable had been in her dressing-room from six o'clock the previous evening until the call-boy went for her before her first cue. Lord Lacing was there, he said, with an eloquent lift of his eyebrow.

Grant smiled and nodded and went away, but as he was making his way back to the Yard, he was not smiling. What was it that had leapt in Ray Marcable's eyes? Not fear. No, Recognition? Yes, that was it. Most certainly recognition.

3—Danny Miller

Grant opened his eyes and regarded the ceiling of his bedroom speculatively. For the last few minutes he had been technically awake, but his brain, wrapped in the woolliness of sleep and conscious of the ungrateful chilliness of the morning, had denied him thought. But though the reasoning part of him had not wakened, he had become more and more conscious of mental discomfort. Something unpleasant waited him. Something exceedingly unpleasant. The growing conviction had dispelled his drowsiness, and his eyes opened on the ceiling laced across with the early sunlight and the shadows of a plane tree; and on recognition of the unpleasantness. It was the morning of the third day of his investigations, the day of the inquest, and he had nothing to put before the coroner. Had not even a scent to follow.

His thoughts went back over yesterday. In the morning, the dead man being still unidentified, he had given Williams the man's tie, that being the newest and most individual thing about him, and had sent him out to scour London. The tie, like the rest of the man's clothes, had been obtained from a branch of a multiple business, and it was a small hope that any shop assistant would remember the individual to whom he sold the tie. Even if he did, there was no guarantee that the man remembered was their man. Faith Brothers must have sold several dozens of ties of the same pattern in London alone. But there was always that last odd chance, and Grant had seen too much of the queer unexpectedness of chance to neglect any avenue of exploration. As Williams was leaving the room an idea had occurred to him. There was that first idea of his that the man had been a salesman in some clothing business. Perhaps he did not buy his things over the counter. He might have been in the employ of Faith Brothers. "Find out," he had said to Williams, "if any one answering the dead man's description has been employed by any one of the branches lately. If you see or hear anything interesting at all —whether you think it is important or not—let me know."

Left alone, he had examined the morning's press. He had not bothered with the various accounts of the queue murder, but the rest of the news he scrutinized with some care, beginning with the personal column. Nothing, however, sounded an answering chord in his brain. A photograph of himself with the caption, "Inspector Grant, who is in charge of the Queue Murder investigations," caused him to frown. "Fools!" he said aloud. He had then collected and studied a list of missing persons sent in from all the police stations in Britain. Five young men were missing from various places, and the description of one, who was missing from a small Durham town, might have been that of the dead man. After a long delay, Grant had succeeded in talking on the telephone to the Durham police, only to learn that the missing man had originally been a miner and was, in the Opinion of the Durham inspector, a tough. And neither "miner" nor "tough" could be applied to the dead man.

The rest of the morning had been occupied with routine work—settling about the inquest and such necessary formalities. About lunch-time Williams had rung him up from the biggest branch of Faith Brothers, in the Strand. He had had a busy but unproductive morning. Not only did no one recall such a purchaser, but no one remembered even selling such a tie. It was not one of a range that they had stocked lately. That had made him want further information about the tie itself, and he had come to the headquarters and asked to see the manager, to whom he explained the situation. The manager now suggested that if the inspector would surrender the tie for a little it should be sent to their factory at Northwood, where a list could be furnished of the destination of all consignments of such ties within, say, the last year. Williams now sought permission to hand over the tie to the manager.

Grant had approved his action, and while mentally commending Williams' common sense—lots of sergeants would have gone on plodding round London because they were told to and it was their duty—thought not too hopefully of the hundred or so branches of Faith Brothers all over Scotland and England. The chances narrowed slightly, however, when Williams appeared with a fuller explanation. Ties like that, it appeared, were made up in boxes of six, each tie in the box being of a different shade though usually in the same colour scheme. It was unlikely that more than one, or at the most two, ties of the exact shade of their specimen had been sent to any one branch. There was therefore more hope of a salesman remembering the customer who had bought it than there would have been if the tie had been merely one of a box all the same shade. The detective part of Grant listened appreciatively while the looker-on part of him smiled over the sergeant's fluency in the jargon of the trade. Half an hour with the manager of Faith Brothers had had the effect of studding the sergeant's habitual simplicity of word and phrase with amazing jewels of technicality. He talked glibly of "lines" and "repeats" and similar profundities, so that Grant had, through his bulk, in a queer television a vivid picture of the manager himself. But he was grateful to Williams and said so. That was part of Grant's charm; he never forgot to say when he was pleased.

In the afternoon, having given up hope of learning anything more by it, he had sent the dagger to the laboratory for analysis. "Tell me anything you can about it," he had said; and last night when he left he was still waiting for the answer. Now he stretched out an arm into the chilly air and grabbed at the telephone. When he got the number he had asked for, he said:

"Inspector Grant speaking. Any developments?"

No, there were no developments. Two people had viewed the body last night—two separate people—but neither had recognized it. Yes, their names and addresses had been taken and were lying on his desk now. There was also a report from the laboratory.

"Good!" said Grant, jammed the earpiece on the hook and sprang out of bed, his sense of foreboding dispelled by the clear light of reason. Over his cold bath he whistled, and all the time he was dressing he whistled, so that his landlady said to her husband, who was departing to catch an eight o'clock bus, "I'm thinking it won't be very long now before that horrible anarchist is caught." "Anarchist" and "assassin" were synonymous terms to Mrs. Field. Grant himself would not have put it so optimistically perhaps, but the thought of that sealed package waiting on his desk was to him what a lucky packet is to a small boy. It might be something of no importance and it might be a diamond. He caught Mrs. Field's benevolent glance on him as she set down his breakfast, and it was like a small boy that he said to her, "This my lucky day, do you think?"

"I don't know about luck, Mr. Grant. I don't know as I believes in it. But I do believe in Providence. And I don't think Providence'll let a nice young man like that be stabbed to death and not bring the guilty to justice. Trust in the Lord, Mr. Grant."

"And if the clues are *very* thin, the Lord and the C.I.D.," Grant misquoted at her and attacked his bacon and eggs. She lingered a moment watching him, shook her head in a gently misgiving way at him, and left him scanning the newspapers while he chewed.

On the way up to town he occupied himself by considering the problem of the man's non-identification, which became momentarily more surprising. True, a few persons every year are thrown up by London to lie unclaimed for a day or two and then vanish into paupers' graves. But they are all either old or penniless or both—the dregs of a city's being, cast off long before their deaths by their relations and friends, and so, when the end came, beyond the ken of any one who might have told their story. In all Grant's experience no one of the type of the dead man—a man who must have had the normal circle of acquaintances if not more—had remained unidentified. Even if he had been a provincial or a foreigner—and Grant did not think he was; the man's whole appearance had proclaimed the Londoner—he must have had a dwelling in London or near it; hotel, lodgings, or club, from which he must now be known to be missing. And the appeals from the Press that the fact of a missing person should be communicated to Scotland Yard without delay would most certainly have brought some one hurrying to report it.

Then, granted that the man was a Londoner—as Grant most heartily believed—why did his people or his landlord not come forward? Obviously, either because they had reason to think the dead man a bad lot, or because they themselves had no wish to attract the attention of the police. A gang? A gang getting rid of an unwanted member? But gangs didn't wait until they got their victim into a queue before dispensing with his services. They chose safer methods.

Unless—yes, it might have been at once a retribution and a warning. It had had all the elements of a gesture—the weapon, the striking down of the victim while in a place of supposed safety, the whole bravado of the thing. It eliminated the backslider and intimidated the survivors at one and the same time. The more he considered it the more it seemed the reasonable explanation of a mystery. He had scouted the thought of a secret society and he still scouted it. The vengeance of a secret society would not prevent the man's friends from reporting his loss and claiming him. But the defaulting member of a gang—that was a different thing. In that case all his friends would either know or guess the manner and reason of his death, and none would be fool enough to come forward.

As Grant turned into the Yard he was revising in his mind the various London gangs that flourished at the moment. Danny Miller's was cock of the walk, undoubtedly, and had been so for some time. It was three years since Danny had seen the inside, and unless he made a grievous error, it would be still longer before he did. Danny had come from America after serving his second sentence for burglary, and had brought with him a clever brain, a belief in organization that was typically American—the British practitioner is by nature an individualist—and a wholesome respect for British police methods. The result was that, though his minions slipped occasionally and served short sentences for their carelessness, Danny went free and successful—much too successful for the liking of the C.I.D. Now, Danny had all the American crook's ruthlessness in dealing with an enemy. His habit was a gun, but he would think no more of sticking a knife into a man than he would of swatting the fly that annoyed him. Grant thought that he would invite Danny to come and see him. Meanwhile there was the packet on his table.

Eagerly he opened it and eagerly skipped the slightly prosy unimportances with which it opened—Bretherton of the scientific side was inclined to be a pompous dogmatist; if you sent him a Persian cat to report on, he would spend the first sheet of foolscap in deciding that its coat was grey and not fawn—and picked out the salient thing. Just above the junction of the handle with the blade, Bretherton said, was a stain of blood which was not the blood on the blade. The base on which the saint stood was hollow and had been broken at one side. The break was merely a cut which did not gape and was almost invisible owing to the bloodstain. But when the surface was pressed, one edge of the rough cut was raised very slightly above the other. In gripping the tool the murderer had made the fracture in the metal gape sufficiently to injure his own hand. He would now be suffering from a jagged cut somewhere on the thumb side of the first finger of the left hand, or finger side of the thumb.

Good so far, thought Grant, but one can't sift London for a left-handed man with a cut hand and arrest him for that. He sent for Williams.

"Do you know where Danny Miller is living now?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Williams; "but Barber will know. He came up from Newbury last night, and he knows all about Danny."

"All right, go and find out. No, better send Barber to me."

When Barber came—a tall, slow man with a sleepy and misleading smile—he repeated his question.

"Danny Miller?" Barber said. "Yes, he has rooms in a house in Amber Street, Pimlico."

"Oh? Been very quiet lately, hasn't he?"

"So we thought, but I think that jewel robbery that the Gowbridge people are busy with now is Danny."

"I thought banks were his line."

"Yes, but he has a new 'jane.' He probably wants money."

"I see. Do you know his number?"

Barber did.

An hour later, Danny, who was performing a leisurely and painstaking toilet in the room in Amber Street, was informed that Inspector Grant would be very much obliged if he would have a short talk with him at the Yard.

Danny's pale grey, wary eyes surveyed the plain-clothes man who had brought the message. "If he thinks he has anything on one," he said, "he has another guess coming."

The plain-clothes man did not think that the inspector wanted anything but some information from him.

"Oh? And what is the inspector inspecting at the moment?"

But that the plain-clothes man either did not know or would not tell.

"All right," said Danny. "I'll be along right now."

When a portly constable led him into Grant's presence Danny, who was small and slim, indicated the departing one with a backward jerk of the head and a humorous lift of an eyebrow. "It isn't often any one troubles to announce me," he said.

"No," said Grant, smiling, "your presence is usually announced after your departure, isn't it?"

"You're a wit, Inspector. I shouldn't have thought you'd need any one to jog your brains along. You don't think you've got anything on me, do you?"

"Not at all. I thought you might be of some use to me."

"You're certainly flattering." It was impossible to tell when Miller was serious or otherwise.

"Did you ever know by sight a man like this?" While he described in detail the murdered man, Grant's eyes were examining Danny, and his brain was busy with what his eyes saw. Gloves. How could he get the glove off Danny's left hand without deliberately asking for its removal?

When he came to the end of his description, particularized even to the turn-in toe, Danny said politely, "That's the deader from the queue. No, I'm very sorry to disappoint you, Inspector, but I never saw the man in my life."

"Well, I suppose you have no objections to coming with me and having a look at him?"

"Not if it'll set your mind at rest, Inspector. I'll do anything to oblige."

The inspector put his hand into his pocket and brought it out full of coins, as if to make sure of his loose change before setting out. A sixpenny piece slid through his fingers and rolled swiftly across the smooth surface of the table towards Miller, and Miller's hand shot out in an abrupt preventive movement as it was about to drop off the table's edge to the floor. He fumbled for a moment with his gloved hand and then laid the coin down on the table.

"Trifling things, these," he remarked in his flat amiable voice. But it was his right hand that he had used to stop it.

As they were driving down to the mortuary in a car he turned to the inspector with the almost noiseless expulsion of breath that in him did duty for a laugh. "Say," he said, "if any of my pals see me now, they'll all be boarding a dangler for Southampton inside five minutes and not waiting to pack."

"Well, we'd do the packing—back," said Grant.

"Got us all taped like that, have you? Would you bet on it? I'll lay you five to one in dollars—no, pounds—five to one in pounds that you don't have one of us settled inside two years. You won't take it? Well, I think you're wise."

When Miller was brought face to face with the body of the murdered man, Grant's eager eyes could trace no shadow of expression on that poker face. Danny's cool grey glance wandered over the dead man's features in a half-interested indifference. And Grant knew certainly that, even had Miller known the man, his hope of a betraying gesture or expression had been a vain one.

"No," Danny was saying, "I never saw the man in my—" He stopped. There was a long pause. "Say, but I did!" he said. "Oh, gosh, let me think! Where was it? Where was it? Wait a minute, and it'll come." He beat a hectic tattoo on his forehead with his gloved palm. Was this acting, thought Grant? Good acting, if so. But then Miller would never make the mistake of acting badly. "Oh, gosh, I can't get it! I talked to him, too. Don't think I ever knew his name, but I'm. sure I talked to him."

In the end Grant gave it up—he had the inquest in front of him—but it was more than Danny Miller did. The fact that his brain had gone back on him was an outrage in his eyes and quite insupportable. "I never forget a man," he kept saying, "any more than a 'bull' does."

"Well, you can think it over and telephone to me," said Grant. "Meanwhile, will you do one thing more for me?...Will you take your gloves off?"

Danny's eyes shut suddenly to bright slits. "What's the big idea?" he said.

"Well, there isn't any reason that you shouldn't take them off, is there?"

"How do I know that?" snapped Danny.

"Look here," said Grant good-naturedly, "a minute ago you wanted a gamble. Well, here's one. If you take your gloves off, I'll tell you whether you've won or not."

"And if I lose?"

"Well, I have no warrant, you know." And Grant smiled easily into the gimlet eyes boring into his own.

Danny's eyelids lifted. His old nonchalance came back. He drew his right glove off and held out his hand. Grant glanced at it and nodded. Then he slipped off his left glove and extended his hand, and as he did so the right hand went back into his coat pocket.

The left hand that lay open to Grant's gaze was clean and unscarred.

"You win, Miller," said Grant. "You're a sportsman." And the slight bulge in Danny's right-hand coat pocket disappeared.

"You'll let me know the minute you have a brainwave, won't you?" Grant said as they parted, and Miller promised.

"Don't you worry," he said. "I don't let my brain go back on me and get away with it.'

And Grant made his way to lunch and the inquest.

The jury, having swallowed at one nauseating gulp the business of viewing the body, had settled into their places with that air of conscious importance and simulated modesty which belongs to those initiated into a mystery. Their verdict was already certain, therefore they had no need to worry themselves over the rights or wrongs of the case. They could give themselves up wholly to the delightful occupation of hearing all about the most popular murder of the day from lips of eyewitnesses. Grant surveyed them sardonically, and thanked the gods that neither his case nor his life depended on their intelligences. Then he forgot them and gave himself up to the rich comedy of the witnesses. It was strange to compare the grim things that fell from their lips with the pretty comedy they themselves presented. He knew them so well by now, and they all ran so amusingly true to form. There was the constable who had been on duty at the Woffington pit queue, brushed and shining, his dampish forehead shining most of all; precise in his report and tremendously gratified by his own preciseness. There was James Ratcliffe, the complete householder, hating his unexpected publicity, rebelling against his connexion with such an unsavoury affair, but determined to do his duty as a citizen. He was the type that is the law's most useful ally, and the inspector recognized the fact and mentally saluted him in spite of the fact that he had been unhelpful. Waiting in queues bored him, he said, and as long as the light was good enough he had read, until the doors opened and the pressure became too great to do anything but stand.

There was his wife, whom the inspector had last seen sobbing in her bedroom. She still clutched a handkerchief, and obviously expected to be encouraged and soothed after every second question. And she was subjected to a longer examination than any one else. She was the one who had stood directly behind the dead man.

"Are we to understand, madam," said the coroner, "that you stood for nearly two hours in close proximity to this man and yet have no recollection of him or of his companions, if any?"

"But I wasn't next to him all that time! I tell you I didn't see him until he fell over at my feet."

"Then who was next in front of you most of the time?"

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"I don't remember. I think it was a boy—a young man."
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- "Can vou describe him?"
- "Yes; he was dark and foreign-looking, rather."
- "Was he alone?"
- "I don't know. I don't think so, somehow. I think he was talking to some one."
- "How is it that you do not remember more distinctly what occurred when it is only three nights ago?"

The shock had put everything out of her head, she said. "Besides," she added, her gelatinous backbone ossified suddenly by the coroner's ill-hidden scorn, "in a queue one doesn't notice the people next one. Both I and my husband were reading most of the time." And she dissolved into hysterical weeping.

Then there was the fat woman, shiny with satin and soap-and-water, recovered now from the shock and reluctance she had displayed at the crowded moment of the murder, and more than willing to tell her tale. Her plump red face and boot-button brown eyes radiated a grim satisfaction with her rôle. She seemed disappointed when the coroner thanked her and dismissed her in the middle of a sentence.

There was a meek little man, as precise in manner as the constable had been, but evidently convinced that the coroner was a man of little intelligence. When that long-suffering official said, "Yes, I was aware that queues usually go two by two," the jury allowed themselves to snigger and the meek little man looked pained. As neither he nor the other three witnesses from the queue could recall the murdered man, or throw any light on any departure from the queue, they were dismissed with scant attention.

The doorkeeper, incoherent with pleasure at being so helpful, informed the coroner that he had seen the dead man before—several times. He had come quite often to the Woffington. But he knew nothing about him. He had always been well dressed. No, the doorkeeper could not recall any companion, though he was sure that the man had not habitually been alone.

The atmosphere of futility that characterized the inquest discouraged Grant. A man whom no one professed to know, stuck in the back by some one whom no one had seen. It was a sweet prospect. No clue to the murder except the dagger, and that told nothing except that the man was scarred on a finger or thumb. No clue to the murdered man except that a Faith Brothers employee might have known the person to whom he sold a fawn patterned tie with faint pink splashes. When the inevitable verdict of murder against some person or persons unknown had been given, Grant went to a telephone revolving in his mind the Ratcliffe woman's tale of a young foreigner. Was that impression a mere figment of her imagination, brought into being by the suggestion of the dagger? Or was it a genuine corroboration of his Levantine theory? Mrs. Ratcliffe's young foreigner had not been there when the murder was discovered. He was the one who had disappeared from the queue, and the one who had disappeared from the queue had most certainly murdered the dead man.

Well, he would find out from the Yard if there was anything new, and if not he would fortify himself with tea. He needed it. And the slow sipping of tea conduced to thought. Not the painful tabulations of Barker, that prince of superintendents, but the speculative revolving of things which he, Grant, found more productive. He numbered among his acquaintances a poet and essayist, who sipped tea in a steady monotonous rhythm, the while he brought to birth his masterpieces. His digestive system was in a shocking condition, but he had a very fine reputation among the more precious of the modern littérateurs.

[&]quot;And what became of the young man?"

[&]quot;I don't know."

[&]quot;Did you see him leave the queue?"

[&]quot;No."

4—Raoul Legarde

But over the telephone Grant heard something which put all thoughts of tea out of his head. There was waiting for him a letter addressed in capitals. Grant knew very well what that meant. Scotland Yard has a wide experience of letters addressed in capitals. He smiled to himself as he hailed a taxi. If people only realized that writing in capitals didn't disguise a hand at all! But he sincerely hoped they never would.

Before he opened the letter that awaited him he dusted it with powder and found it covered with fingerprints. He slit the top delicately, holding the letter, which was fat and softish, in a pair of forceps, and drew out a wad of Bank of England five-pound notes and a half-sheet of notepaper. On the notepaper was printed: "To bury the man who was found in the queue."

There were five notes. Twenty-five pounds.

Grant sat down and stared. In all his time in the C.I.D. a more unexpected thing had not happened. Somewhere in London tonight was some one who cared sufficiently for the dead man to spend twenty-five pounds to keep him from a pauper's grave, but who would not claim him. Was this corroboration of his intimidation theory? Or was it conscience money? Had the murderer a superstitious desire to do the right thing by his victim's body? Grant thought not. The man who stuck another in the back didn't care a hoot what became of the body. The man had a pal man or woman in London tonight, a pal who cared to the tune of twenty-five pounds.

Grant called in Williams, and together they considered the plain, cheap, white envelope and the strong, plain capitals.

"Well," said Grant, "what do you know?"

"A man," said Williams. "Not well off. Not used to writing much. Clean. Smokes. Depressed."

"Excellent!" said Grant. "You're no good as a Watson, Williams. You get away with all the kudos."

Williams, who knew all about Watson—at the age of eleven he had spent hunted moments in a hayloft in Worcestershire trying to read *The Speckled Band* without being discovered by Authority, who had banned it smiled and said, "I expect you have got far more out of it, sir."

But Grant had not. "Except that he's a poor hand at the business. Fancy sending anything as easily traced as English five-pound notes!" He blew the light, soft powder over the half-sheet of notepaper, but found no fingerprints. He summoned a constable and sent the precious envelope and the bundle of notes to have all fingerprints photographed. The sheet of notepaper bearing the printed message he sent to the handwriting expert.

"Well, the banks are shut now, worse luck. Are you in a hurry to get back to the missus, Williams?"

No, Williams was in no hurry. His missus and the baby were in Southend with his mother-in-law for a week.

"In that case," Grant said, "we'll dine together and you can give me the benefit of your ideas on the subject of murders in queues."

Some years before, Grant had inherited a considerable legacy—a legacy sufficient to permit him to retire into idle nonentity if such had been his desire. But Grant loved his work even when he swore and called it a dog's life, and the legacy had been used only to smooth and embroider life until what would have been the bleak places were eliminated, and to make some bleak places in other lives less impossible. There was a little grocer's shop in a southern suburb, bright as a jewel with its motley goods, which owed its existence to the legacy and to Grant's chance meeting with a ticket-of-leave man on his first morning out. It was Grant who had been the means of "putting him away," and it was Grant who provided the means of his rehabilitation. It was owing entirely to the legacy, therefore, that Grant was an habitué of so exclusive an eating place as Laurent's, and—a much more astonishing and impressive fact—a pet of the head waiter's. Only five persons in Europe are pets of Laurent's head waiter, and Grant was thoroughly conscious of the honour, and thoroughly sensible of the reason.

Marcal met them halfway down the green-and-gold room, with his face screwed to an expression of the most excruciating sorrow. He was desolated, but there was not a table worthy of Monsieur left. There were no tables at all except that much-to-be condemned one in that corner. Monsieur had not let him know that he was to be expected. He was desolated, desolated simply.

Grant took the table without a murmur. He was hungry, and he did not care where he ate so that the food was good, and except for the fact that the table was directly outside the service door there was no fault to be found with it. A couple of green draught-screens camouflaged the door, and the door, being a swing one, kept the rattle of crockery to a faint castanet music that blossomed every now and then in a sudden fortissimo as the door swung wide and closed again. Over their dinner Grant decided that in the morning Williams should visit the banks in the area indicated by the letter's postmark, and with that as a basis, track down the history of the bank-notes. It shouldn't be difficult; banks were always accommodating. From that they turned to the discussion of the crime itself. It was Williams' opinion that it was a gang affair; that the dead man had fallen foul of his gang, had known his danger, had borrowed the gun from the only friendly member of the crowd, and had never had a chance to use it. The money that had arrived tonight had come from the secretly friendly one. It was a good enough theory, but it left out things.

"Why had he no identification marks on him, then?"

"Perhaps," said Williams with electrifying logic, "it's a gang habit. No identification if they're caught."

That was a possible theory, and Grant was silent for a little, thinking it over. It was with the entree that he became conscious, with that sixth sense which four years on the western front and many more in the C.I.D. had developed to an abnormal acuteness, that he was being watched. Restraining the impulse to turn round—he was sitting with his back to the room, almost facing the service door—he glanced casually into the mirror. But no one seemed to be taking the slightest interest in him. Grant continued to eat, and in a moment or two tried again. The room had emptied considerably since their arrival, and it was easy to examine the various people in the vicinity. But the mirror showed only a collection of self-absorbed people, eating, drinking, and smoking. And still Grant had that sense of being subjected to a long scrutiny. It made his flesh creep, that steady, unseen examination. He lifted his eyes above Williams' head to the screen that hid the door. And there, in the chink between the screens, were the eyes that watched him. As if conscious of his discovery, the eyes wavered and disappeared, and Grant went serenely on with his meal. A too curious waiter, he thought. Probably knows who I am, and just wanted to gape at any one connected with a murder. Grant had suffered much from the gapers. But presently,

looking up in the middle of a sentence, he found the eyes back at their examination of him. This was too much. He stared stolidly in return. But the owner of the eyes was evidently unaware that he was visible at all to Grant, and continued his watching uninterrupted. Now and then as a waiter came or went behind the screen the eyes disappeared, but always they returned to their furtive gazing. Grant was seized with a desire to see this man whose interest in himself was of so absorbing a character. He said to Williams, who was seated not more than a yard in front of the screen, "There is some one at the back of the screen behind you who is taking a most abnormal interest in us. When I click my fingers fling back your right and knock the screen sideways. Make it look as much like an accident as you can."

Grant waited until the waiter traffic had lulled for a little and the eyes were steady at gaze, and then gently snapped his middle finger and thumb. Williams' brawny arm shot out, the screen quivered for a moment and collapsed sideways. But there was no one there. Only the agitated swinging of the door showed where some one had made his hasty exit.

Well, that's that, thought Grant, as Williams was apologizing for the accident with the screen. You can't identify a pair of eyes. He finished his dinner without further annoyance and strolled back to the Yard with Williams, hoping that the photographs of the prints on the envelope would be ready for his examination.

No photographs had come, but there was a report on the tie which had been sent to Faith Brothers' factory at Northwood. The only consignment of that pattern of tie sent out in the last year was a box of six in various shades which had been sent as a repeat order at the request of their Nottingham branch. They returned the tie and hoped that if they could be of any further use the inspector would command them.

"If nothing important turns up between now and tomorrow," said Grant, "I shall go down to Nottingham while you are doing the banks"

And then a man came in with photographs of the envelope prints, and Grant took from his desk the photographs of the other prints in the case the prints of the dead man's fingertips and the prints found on the revolver. Nothing but smudges, the report said, had been found on any of the bank-notes, so Grant and the sergeant applied themselves to the examination of the envelope prints. A variety of impressions were apparent since several people had handled the envelope since the writer had posted the letter. But clear and perfect and without possibility of doubt was the print of a forefinger to the right of the flap, and the forefinger was the same forefinger that had left its mark on the revolver found in the dead man's pocket.

"Well, that fits your theory about the friend who supplied the gun, doesn't it?" said Grant.

But the sergeant made a queer choked noise and continued to look at the print.

"What's the matter? It's as clear as a kid's alphabet."

The sergeant straightened himself and looked queerly at his superior. "I'll swear I hadn't a glass too much, sir. But it's either that or the whole fingerprint system is balmy. Look at that!" He pointed with a not too steady forefinger at a print in the extreme lower right-hand corner, and as he did so he shoved the dead man's fingerprints, which had lain slightly apart, under Grant's nose. For a little there was silence while the inspector compared the prints and the sergeant, over his shoulder, half-fearfully corroborated his previous view. But there was no getting away from the fact that faced them in irrefutable whorls and ridges. The fingerprint was that of the dead man.

It was only a moment or two before Grant realized the simple significance of that apparently staggering fact.

"Communal notepaper, of course," he said offhandedly, while his looker-on half mocked at him for having allowed himself to be victimized even for a moment by the childish amazement that had overcome him. "Your theory blossoms, Williams. The man who lent the gun and provided the money lived with the dead man. That being so, of course he can spin any kind of yarn he likes to his landlady or his wife or whoever would be interested about the disappearance of his chum." He took up the telephone on his desk. "We'll see what the handwriting people have to say about the piece of notepaper."

But the handwriting experts had nothing to add to what Grant already knew or guessed. The paper was of a common type that could be bought at any stationer's or bookstall. The printing was that of a man. Given a specimen of a suspect's handwriting, they would probably be able to say whether or not the printing had been done by him, but so far they could be of no more help than already indicated.

Williams departed to his temporarily bereaved home to comfort his uxorious mind by reminding himself how short a week was, and how pretty Mrs. Williams would be when she came back from Southend; and Grant remained where he was, trying to mesmerize the dagger into giving up its tale. It lay on the dark green leather surface of his desk, a graceful, wicked, toy-like thing, its business end in its slender viciousness making a queer contrast to the bluff saint on the handle with his silly, expressionless face. Grant considered the saintly features sardonically. What was it Ray Marcable had said? You'd want a blessing on an undertaking as big as that. Well, Grant thought, he would choose a more potent saint as 0.C. affairs than the ineffectual holy one on the handle. His thoughts went to Ray Marcable. This morning's press had been full of her projected departure for America, the popular papers expressing themselves in lamentation and the more high-brow in bitterness and indignation that British managers should allow the best musical comedy star of a generation to leave the country. Should he go to her, Grant wondered, before she left and ask her bluntly why she had looked surprised at the description of the dagger? There had been nothing to connect her even remotely with the crime. He knew her history—the little semi-detached villa in a dreary suburb that she had called home, and the council school she had attended, her real name, which was Rosie Markham. He had even met Mr. and Mrs. Markham over the affair of the suitcase. It was exceedingly unlikely that she could throw any light on the Queue Murder. And it was still more unlikely that she would if she could. She had had her chance to be frank with him over that tea in her dressing-room, and she had quite deliberately kept him outside any knowledge she might have had. That knowledge, of course, might be entirely innocent. Her surprise might have been due to recognition of the dagger's description, and yet have nothing to do with the murder. The dagger was far from unique, and many people must have seen and handled similar weapons. No, either way he was not likely to get much satisfaction from another interview with Miss Marcable. She would have to depart for the United States uninterrogated.

With a sigh for its unproductiveness he locked the dagger away in its drawer again and set off for home. He came out on to the Embankment to find that it was a fine night with a light, frosty mist in the air, and he decided that he would walk home. The midnight streets of London—always so much more beautiful than the choppy crowded ones of the daytime fascinated him. At noon London

made you a present of an entertainment, rich and varied and amusing. But at midnight she made you a present of herself; at midnight you could hear her breathe.

When at length he turned into the road where he lived he had come to the stage of walking automatically, and a starry mist possessed his brain. For a little while Grant had "shut his eyes." But he was not asleep, actually or metaphorically, and the eyes of his brain opened with a start at the dim figure that was waiting on the opposite corner just outside the lamplight. Who was hanging about at this hour?

He debated rapidly whether or not to cross and walk down the other side of the street, and so come within criticizing distance of the figure. But it was rather late to change his direction. He held on, ignoring the loiterer. Only when he was turning in at his own gate he looked back. The figure was still there, almost indistinguishable in the gloom.

It was after twelve when he let himself in with his latchkey, but Mrs. Field was waiting up for him. "I thought you'd like to know that there has been a gentleman here asking for you. He wouldn't wait and he wouldn't leave a message."

"How long ago was that?"

More than an hour, Mrs. Field said. She didn't see him rightly. He had stood well out beyond the step. But he was young.

"No name?"

No, he refused to give a name.

"All right," said Grant. "You go to bed. If he comes back, I'll let him in."

She hesitated in the doorway. "You won't do anything rash, will you?" she said solicitously. "I don't like the thought of you bin here all alone with some one who might be an anarchist for all we know."

"Don't you worry, Mrs. Field. You won't be blown up tonight."

"It isn't blowing up I'm afraid of," she said. "It's the thought of you lyin' here perhaps bleeding to death and no one knowing. Think how I'd feel when I came in in the morning and found you like that."

Grant laughed. "Well, you can comfort yourself. There isn't the slightest chance of anything so thrilling happening. No one has ever spilt my blood except Jerry at Contalmaison, and that was more by luck than good management."

She conceded the point. "See you have a bite before you go to bed," she said, indcating the food on the sideboard. "I got you some English tomatoes, and the beef is Tomkins' best pickled." She said good night and went, but she could not have reached her kitchen before a knock sounded on the door. Grant heard her go to the door, and even while his brain was speculating about his visitor, the looker-on in him was wondering whether it was spunk or curiosity that had sent Mrs. Field so willingly to answer the knock. A moment later she threw open the sitting-room door and said, "A young gentleman to see you, sir," and into Grant's eager presence came a youth of nineteen or twenty, fairly tall, dark, broad-shouldered, but slight, and poised on his feet like a boxer. As he came forward he shot a furtive glance from his brilliant dark eyes into the corner behind the door, and he came to a halt some yards from the inspector in the middle of the room, turning a soft felt hat in his slim gloved hands.

"You are Inspector Grant?" he asked.

Grant motioned him to a chair, and the youth, with a completely un-English grace, subsided sideways on to it, still clutching his hat, and began to talk.

"I saw you tonight at Laurent's. I am in the pantry there. I clean the silver and things like that. They told me who you were, and after I think for a while, I decided to tell you all about it."

"A very good idea," said Grant. "Carry on. Are you Italian?"

"No; I am French. My name is Raoul Legarde."

"All right; carry on."

"I was in the queue the night the man was killed. It was my night off. For a long time I was standing next the man. He trod on my foot in accident, and after that we talked a little—about the play. I was on the outside and he was next the wall. Then a man came to talk to him and came in in front of me. The man who was new wanted something from the other man. He stayed until the door opened and the people moved. He was angry about something. They were not quarrelling—not as we quarrel—but I think they were angry. When the murder happened I ran away. I did not want to be mixed up with the police. But tonight I saw you, and you looked *gentil*, and so I made up my mind to tell you all about it."

"Why didn't you come to Scotland Yard and tell me?"

"I do not trust the Sûreté. They make very much out of nothing. And I have no friends in London."

"When the man came to talk to the man who was murdered, and pushed you back a place, who was between you and the theatre wall?"

"A woman in black."

Mrs. Ratcliffe. So far the boy was telling the truth.

"Can you describe the man who came and went away again?"

"He was not very tall. Not as tall as me. He had a hat like mine, only more brown, and a coat like mine"—he indicated his tight-fitting, waisted navy-blue coat—"only brown too. He was very dark, without moustache, and these stuck out." He touched his own beautifully modelled cheek and chin bones.

"Would you know him again if you saw him?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well enough to swear to?"

"What is that?"

"To take your oath on."

"Oh, yes.'

"What did the two men quarrel about?"

"I don't know. I didn't hear. I was not deliberately listening, you understand, and though I speak English, I do not understand if people talk very quickly. I think the man who came wanted something that the mangy who was killed would not give him."

"When the man went away from the queue, how is it that no one saw him go?"

"Because just then the policeman was walking down saying 'Stand back' to the people."

That was too glib. The inspector took out his notebook and pencil and, laying the pencil on the open page, held it out to his visitor. "Can you show me how you stood in the queue? Put marks for the people, and label them."

The boy stretched out his left hand for the book, took the pencil in his right, and made a very intelligent diagram, unaware that he had at that moment defeated the distrusted Sûreté's attempt to make something out of nothing.

Grant watched his serious, absorbed face and thought rapidly. He was telling the truth, then. He had been there until the man collapsed, had backed with the others away from the horror, and had continued backing until he could walk away from the danger of being at the mercy of foreign police. And he had actually seen the murderer and would recognize him again. Things were beginning to move.

He took back the book and pencil that the boy extended to him, and as he raised his eyes from the consideration of the diagram he caught the dark eyes resting rather wistfully on the food on the sideboard. It occurred to him that Legarde had probably come straight from his work to see him.

"Well, I'm very grateful to you," he said. "Have some supper with me now, before you go."

The boy refused shyly, but allowed himself to be persuaded, and together they had a substantial meal of Mr. Tomkins' best pickled. Legarde talked freely of his people in Dijon—the sister who sent him French papers, the father who disapproved of beer since one ate grapes but not hops; of his life at Laurent's and his impression of London and the English. And when Grant eventually let him out into the black stillness of the early morning, he turned on the doorstep and said apologetically and naively, "I am sorry now that I did not tell before, but you understand how it was? To have run away at first made it difficult. And I did not know that the police were so *qentil.*"

Grant dismissed him with a friendly pat on the shoulder, locked up, and picked up the telephone receiver. When the connexion was made, he said:

"Inspector Grant speaking. This to be sent to all stations: 'Wanted, in connexion with the London Queue Murder, a left-handed man, about thirty years of age, slightly below middle height, very dark in complexion and hair, prominent cheek and chin bones, clean-shaven. When last seen was wearing a soft brown hat and tight-fitting brown coat. Has a recent scar on the left forefinger or thumb."

And then he went to bed.

5—Danny Again

Running out of Marylebone into the sunlight of the morning, Grant looked out of his carriage window and felt more optimistic than he had since he had first interviewed the officials at Gow Street Police Station. The murderer had ceased to be a mythical being. They had a full description of him now, and it could only be a matter of time before they ran him down. And perhaps by tonight he would have settled the identity of the murdered man. He stretched his legs in the empty compartment and let the sun slide slowly back and fore over them as the train wheeled in its progress. A pleasant country, England, at ten of a bright morning. Even the awful little suburban villas had lost that air of aggressiveness born of their inferiority complex, and were shining self-forgetful and demure in the clear light. Their narrow, inhospitable doors were no longer ugly in the atrociousness of cheap paint and appliqué mouldings; they were entrances of jade and carnelian and lapis lazuli and onyx into particular separate heavens. Their gardens, with their pert, ill-dressed rows of tulips and meagre seed-sown grass, were lovely as ever the hanging gardens of Babylon had been. Here and there a line of gay, motley child's clothes danced and ballooned with the breeze in a necklace of coloured laughter. And farther on, when the last vestiges of the town fell away, the wide acres of the grass country smiled broadly in the sunlight like an old hunting print. All England was lovely this morning, and Grant knew it. Even Nottingham canals had a Venetian touch of blue today, and their grimy, imprisoning walls were rosy as Petra.

Grant came out of the station into the drone and clamour of trams. If he had been asked what represented the Midlands in his mind, he would unhesitatingly have said trams. Trams in London always seemed to him alien incongruities, poor provincials who had been inveigled to the Metropolis, and drudged out a misanthropic and despised existence, because they had never made enough money to get out of it. Grant never heard the far-away peculiar sing of an approaching tramcar without finding himself back in the dead, airless atmosphere of the Midland town where he had been born. The Midlanders did not hide away their trams in back streets; they trailed them proudly through their chiefest thoroughfares, partly from braggadocio, partly from a misplaced idea of utility. A long yellow string of them stood in Nottingham marketplace, blocking the view of the wide, almost continental square, and making the passage from the pavement on one side to the stalls of the market on the other a most exhilarating game of hide-and-seek. But the natives, with that adaptability to circumstances which is nature's greatest marvel, seemed to enjoy the hop-skip-and-jump business, and to find it not too dangerous to be indulged in. No one was killed during the time that Grant walked down the street at any rate.

At Faith Brothers' he produced the tie which had belonged to the dead man, and explained that he wanted to know whether any one remembered selling it. The man at the counter had no recollection of the transaction, but summoned a colleague, who was flipping a white and too flexible forefinger up and down the wall of cardboard boxes in an endeavor to find an article that would meet with his customer's approval. Something told Grant that in matters sartorial this youth would have the memory of an oldest inhabitant, and he was right. After one glance at the tie, he said that he had taken it out of the window—or one exactly like it—for a gentleman about a month ago. The gentleman had seen it in the window and, because it matched the suit he was wearing, hail come in and bought it. No, he did not think that he was a Nottingham man. Why? Well, he didn't *talk* Nottingham for one thing, and he didn't *dress* Nottingham for another

Could he describe the man?

He could, and did, with minuteness and accuracy. "I can tell you the date, if you like," said this surprising youth. "I remember because"—he hesitated, and finished with a refreshing lapse from his worldly-wise air to a pink naïveté—"because of something that happened that day. It was the 2nd of February."

Grant noted the date and asked what his impression of the stranger had been. Was he a commercial traveller?

The youth thought not. He didn't talk business and he didn't seem interested in the growth of Nottingham or anything.

Grant asked if there was anything on in the town on that date that would bring a stranger to Nottingham, and the youth said yes, most emphatically. There had been a huge musical festival a festival for all the Midlands; and there had been a good few people from London too. He knew, because he himself had taken part in it. He sang in a church choir and knew all about festivals. The stranger had looked much more like some one interested in the festival than like a commercial traveller. He had thought at the time that that was probably what the man was in Nottingham for.

Grant thought it was quite likely. He remembered the man's sensitive hands. And he had been an habitué of the Woffington—which, if not highbrow, is at least invariably musical. It didn't march with the gang theory, but he could not afford to ignore it because of that. The gang theory had no support in fact. It was a theory and nothing else—pure speculation. He thanked the youth and asked for the name of some one in Nottingham who would know all about the festival and the people who came to it. The youth said that he had better go and see Yeudall, the solicitor. Yeudall wasn't the secretary; but he was a sort of chairman, and it was his hobby. He sat there from morning to night, all the three days of the festival, and he would be certain to know any one who was interested enough to come from London for it.

Grant wrote down Yeudall's address, conscious that the youth's inquisitive mind was docketing him as it had docketed the dead man, and that years hence, if some one asked him to describe the man who took Yeudall's address, he would do it faithfully. He was wasted in a hatter's-and-hosier's.

"Are you looking for the man who bought the tie?" the youth asked. He said "looking" in inverted commas, giving it its police sense.

"Not exactly," said Grant, "but I want to trace him if I can." And he departed to interview Mr. Yeudall.

In a little side street, near the castle—the kind of street that has never seen a tramcar and where one's footsteps echo until one involuntarily looks behind—were situated the small and gloomy offices of Yeudall, Lister & Yeudall. Three hundred years old they were, and the waiting-room was panelled in oak that extinguished the last valiant ray of light as it fought its way past the old greenish glass of the window-pane. The light died on the window-sill as the last survivor of a charge dies on the enemy parapet, murdered but glorious. But Mr. Yeudall, of Yeudall, Lister & Yeudall, would have considered it heresy if it had been suggested that things might be

otherwise. Otherwise! That meant a building like a meat-safe, fretted with windows until the walls were practically non-existent. A collection of plate-glass bound together by pilasters of an incredible ignobility! That was modern architecture! But, as if to make up for the dim dustiness of his surroundings, Mr. Yeudall himself beamed and shone and welcomed all humanity with that sublime lack of suspicion which makes friends, and "confidence" men, but never lawyers. Being the only Yeudall of the third generation, he had been given in his youth a cupboard-like corner in the warren of small rooms that were the Yeudall offices, and, since he loved oak panelling and beams and greenish glass second only to symphonies and sonatas, he had stayed there. And now he was Yeudall, Lister & Yeudall—though a competent clerk kept anything too awful from happening.

To say that Mr. Yeudall welcomed the inspector is an inadequate statement. Grant felt that he must have met the man before and have forgotten it. He betrayed none of the curiosity that was usually rampant on a man's face when the inspector followed his card into a room. Grant was to him merely another charming fellow-being, and almost Before he had made his business clear Grant Found himself being led away to lunch. It was so much nicer to talk over a meal, and it was long after one o'clock and if the inspector hadn't eaten since breakfast, he must be famishing. Grant followed his unexpected host meekly enough; he had not yet got his information, and this seemed to be the only way of getting it. Moreover, a detective officer never throws away the chance of making an acquaintance. If Scotland Yard has a motto it is You Never Know.

Over lunch he learned that Mr. Yeudall had never to his knowledge seen the man he was looking for. He knew by sight or personally all the performers at the festival as well as a great number of those merely interested in it. But none tallied exactly with the description Grant furnished.

"If you think he was musical, try Lyons' orchestra or the picture-houses. Their orchestra performers are mostly Londoners."

Grant did not bother to explain that the supposition that the man was musical had arisen through his supposed connexion with the festival. It was easier and pleasanter to let Mr. Yeudall talk. In the afternoon, however, after he had taken farewell of his cheerful host, he did sift the various orchestras in the town, with the lack of success that he had foreseen. He then telephoned to the Yard to find out how Williams had fared in his hunt after the history of the bank-notes, and spoke to Williams himself, who had just come back after a long morning's work. The notes were with the bank just now. Nothing had transpired so far, but they were on a scent, and the bank were working it.

Well, thought Grant, as he hung up the receiver, one end of the tangle seemed to be working out slowly but surely. Nothing left so clear and incontrovertible a history behind it as a Bank of England note. And if he had failed at Nottingham to trace the dead man himself, their discovery of the friend's identity would inevitably lead them to the knowledge of who the dead man was. And from the dead man to the Levantine would be only a step. Still, he was slightly depressed. He had had such a hunch this morning that before night an unexpected piece of information would have set him on the right track that he surveyed his wasted day with something like disgust, and not even the after-effects of the good lunch Mr. Yeudall had given him, nor the rosy afterglow of that gentleman's good will to men, was sufficient to comfort him. At the station he found that he had half an hour to wait for his train, and he betook himself to the lounge of the nearest hotel in the vague hope of picking up unconsidered trifles of information in that most gossipy of all public places. He surveyed the two waiters with a jaundiced eye. One was supercilious and like an overfed pug, and the other was absentminded and like a dachshund. Grant felt instinctively that help was not in them. But the person who brought him his coffee was a charming middle-aged waitress. Grant's weary soul brightened at the sight of her. In a few minutes he was indulging in a friendly, if disjointed, exchange of generalities, and when she went away temporarily to attend to the wants of some one else she always came back and hovered within speaking distance until the conversation was resumed. Realizing that a verbal description of a man who was not a hunchback or blind or otherwise abnormal would convey nothing to this woman, who saw in one day at least half a dozen men who might have fitted a description of the dead man, Grant contented himself with giving leads which might provoke useful information of a relative sort.

"You're quiet here just now," he said.

Yes, she admitted; this was their quiet time. They had slack times and busy ones. It just happened like that.

Did it depend on the number of people staying in the hotel?

No, not always. But usually it did. The hotel was the same: they had slack times and busy ones.

Was the hotel ever full up?

Yes; it had been full to bursting when the Cooperative came. The whole two hundred rooms. It was the only time she remembered such a crowd in Nottingham.

"When was that?" asked Grant.

"At the beginning of February," she said. "They come twice a year, though."

At the beginning of February!

Where did the Cooperative people come from?

From all over the Midlands.

Not from London?

No, she thought not; but some of them might have.

Grant went to catch his train, revolving the new possibility and not finding it acceptable, though he was not quite sure why. The dead man had not looked that type. If he had been a shop assistant, it had been in a business requiring considerable chic on the part of its employees.

The journey back to town was not a slow and pleasant revolving of sunlit thoughts. The sun had gone, and a grey mist blotted out the lines of the country. It looked flat, dreary, and unwholesome in the wan evening. Here and there a sheet of water gleamed balefully from among the poplars with the flat, unreflecting surface of pewter. Grant devoted himself to the papers and, when he had exhausted them, watched the grey, formless evening flying past, and let his mind play with the problem of the dead man's occupation. There were three other men in the compartment, and their voluble and occasionally vociferous pronouncements on the subject of casings, whatever they might be, distracted and annoyed him unreasonably. A tangle of signal lights, hung isolated and unrelated in their ruby and emerald across the fading daylight, restored his good humour a little. They were a wonder and a revelation, these lights. It was

incredible that anything so faery had its invisible support in stout standards and cross bars, and its being in a dynamo. But he was glad when the long roar and rattle over the points proclaimed the end of the journey, and the more robust lights of London hung above him.

As he turned into the Yard he had a queer feeling that the thing he had set out to find was waiting for him here. His hunch had not played him false. That scrap of information that would be the key to the whole of the dead man's story was about to be put into his hand. His steps quickened unconsciously. He could hardly wait. Never had lifts seemed so slow or passages so long.

* * *

And after all there was nothing—nothing but the written report which Williams, who had gone to tea, had left for him when he should come in—a more detailed recapitulation of what he had already heard over the telephone.

But at the exact moment that Inspector Grant had turned into the Yard a queer thing had happened to Danny Miller. He had been seated sideways in an easy-chair in an upper room of the house in Pimlico, his neat feet in their exquisite shoes dangling idly from the upholstered arm, and a cigarette in a six-inch holder projecting at an aggressive angle from his thin mouth. Standing in the middle of the floor was his "jape." She was engaged in trying on a series of evening frocks, which she wrested from their cardboard shells as one thumbs peas from a pod. Slowly she turned her beautiful body so that the light caught the beaded surface of the fragile stuff and accentuated the long lines of her figure.

"That's a nice one, isn't it?" she said, her eyes seeking Danny's in the mirror. But even as she looked she saw the eyes, focused on the middle of her back, widen to a wild stare. She swung round. "What's the matter?" she asked. But Danny apparently did not hear her; the focus of his eyes did not alter. Suddenly he snatched the cigarette-holder from his mouth, pitched the cigarette into the fireplace, and sprang to his feet with wild gropings about him.

"My hat!" he said. "Where's my hat? Where the hell's my hat!"

"It's on the chair behind you," she said, amazed. "What's biting you?"

Danny snatched the hat and fled out of the room as if all the fiends in the lower regions were on his heels. She heard him pitch himself down the stairs, and then the front door closed with a bang. She was still standing with startled eyes on the door when she heard him coming back. Up the stairs he came, three at a time, as lightly as a cat, and burst into her presence.

"Gimme tuppence," he said. "I haven't got tuppence."

Mechanically she reached out for the very expensive and rather beautiful handbag that had been one of his presents to her, and produced two pennies. "I didn't know you were that broke," she said in an effort to goad him into explanation. "What do you want them for?"

"You go to blazes!" he snapped, and disappeared again.

He arrived at the nearest call-box slightly breathless but exceedingly pleased with himself, and without condescending to anything so mundane as a consultation with the telephone directory, demanded to be connected with Scotland Yard. During the subsequent delay he executed a neat shuffle on the floor of the call-box as a means of expressing at once his impatience and his triumph. At last—there was Grant's voice at the end of the wire.

"I say, Inspector, this is Miller speaking. I've just remembered where I saw that guy you were talking about. 'Member?...Well, I travelled in a race train to Leicester with him, end of January, I think it was...Sure? I remember as if it was yesterday. We talked racing, and he seemed to know quite a lot about it. But I never saw him before or since...Eh?...No, I didn't see any bookmaking things...Don't mention it. I'm pleased to be able to help. I told you my brain didn't go back on me for long!"

Danny quitted the box and set out, a little more soberly this time, to smooth down an outraged and abandoned female in a beaded evening frock, and Grant hung up his receiver and expelled a long breath. A race train! The thing had all the fittingness of truth. What a fool he had been! What a double-dyed infernal fool! Not to have thought of that. Not to have remembered that though Nottingham to two-thirds of Britain may mean lace, to the other third it means racing. And of course racing explained the man—his clothes, his visit to Nottingham, his predilection for musical comedy, even—perhaps—the gang.

Fie sent out for a *Racing Up-to-Date*. Yes, there had been a jumping meeting at Colwick Park on the second of February. And one in Leicester at the end of January. That checked Danny's statement. Danny had provided the key.

Information like that, Grant thought bitterly, *would* come on a Saturday evening when bookmakers were as if they had not been, as far as their offices were concerned. And as for tomorrow—no bookmaker was at home on a Sunday. The very thought of a whole day without travelling scattered them over the length and breadth of England in their cars as quicksilver scatters when spilt. Both bank and bookmaking investigations would be hindered by the intervention of the week-end.

Grant left word of his whereabouts and repaired to Laurent's. On Monday there would be more hack work—a round of the offices with the tie and revolver—the revolver that no one so far had claimed to have seen. But perhaps before then the banknotes would have provided a clue that would speed things up and obviate the laborious method of elimination. Meantime he would have an early dinner and think things over.

6—The Levantine

The green-and-gold room was half empty as he made his way to a corner, and Marcel lingered to talk. Things marched with the inspector, it seemed? Ah, but Inspector Grant was a marvel. To have built a whole man out of a little dagger! (The Press, with the exception of the early-morning editions, had blazoned the wanted man's description all over Britain.) It was a thing à *faire peur*. If he, Marcel, was to bring him a fish fork with the entreé, it might be made to prove that he had a corn on the left little toe.

Grant disclaimed any such Holmesian qualities. "The usual explanation advanced for such little mistakes is that the guilty one is in love."

"Ah, non alors!" laughed Marcel. "I defy even Inspector Grant to find me guilty of that."

"Oh? Are you misanthrope?" asked Grant.

No; Marcel loved his kind, but his wife was an exacting woman, Grant should know.

"I think I made the acquaintance of a pantry boy of yours the other day," Grant said. "Legarde, was it?"

Ah, Raoul. A good boy, very. And beautiful too, *hein*? Such a profile and such eyes! They had wanted him for the cinema, but Raoul would have none of it. He was going to be *maitre d'hôtel*, Raoul. And if Marcel was any judge, he would be.

A new arrival took the table opposite, and Marcel, the geniality gone from his face like snowflakes on a wet pavement, went to listen to his needs with that mixture of tolerant superciliousness and godlike abstraction which he used to all but his five favourites. Grant made a leisurely meal, but even after lingering over coffee it was still early when he found himself in the street. The Strand was brilliant as day and crowded, the ebb of the late home-goers meeting the current of the early pleasure-seekers and causing a fret that filled both footpath and roadway. Slowly he walked up the gaudy pavement towards Charing Cross, in and out of the changing light from the shop windows: rose light, gold light, diamond light; shoe shop, clothes shop, jewellers. Presently, in the wider pavement before the old "bottleneck," the crowd thinned out and men and women became individual beings instead of the corpuscles of a mob. A man who had been walking several yards in front of Grant turned round as if to see the number of an oncoming bus. His glance fell on Grant, and in the bright diamond light from the window his placid face became suddenly a mask of horror. Without a second's hesitation or a look to right or left he plunged headlong into the traffic in front of the charging bus. Grant was held up by the bus as it thundered past, but before the end of it had swung by he was off the pavement and into the maelstrom after the man. In that crowded moment, when his eyes were more for a figure in flight than for the dangers that threatened himself, he thought distinctly. "Won't it be awful to die under a bus in the Strand after dodging the boche for four years!" A yell in his ear, and he hovered in flight sufficiently to let a taxi scrape past him by inches with a blasphemous driver howling vituperation at him. He dodged a yellow sports car, saw a whirring black thing at his left elbow which he recognized as the front wheel of a bus, leaped back, was charged on his right by another taxi, and sprang behind the bus as it passed, and a yard in front of the following one to safety on the far pavement. A quick glance to right and left. There was his man walking composedly towards Bedford Street. He had evidently not expected such a quick decision on the inspector's part. Grant metaphorically vowed a candle to the saint that had taken him safely across the street, and fell to the casual stroll that kept him at the right distance from his quarry. Now, if he looks round before Bedford Street, he thought, I'll know I wasn't mistaken—that it really was the sight of me and not a sudden thought that scared him. But he did not need another glance at the man to verify his impression of high cheekbones, thin dark face, and jutting chin. And he knew as surely as if he saw it that on the man's left forefinger or thumb was a recent scar.

A second later the man looked back—not with that momentary, absent-minded glance that one gives, not knowing why, but with that two-second turn of the head which means a deliberate scrutiny. And a second after he had vanished up Bedford Street. And then Grant sprinted. Vividly he could see in his mind that thin figure flying up the dark and deserted street with none to say him nay. As he turned the corner and pulled up he could see no sign of his quarry. Now, not even a Burleigh could have been out of sight in the time if he had taken a straight course, so Grant, expecting a bluff, walked briskly up the right-hand side of the street, his eye wary at each recess. As nothing materialized he grew anxious; a consciousness of being fooled grew within him. He stopped and looked back, and as he did so, down at the Strand end a figure moved from a doorway on the other side of the street and fled back to the crowded thoroughfare it had left. In thirty seconds Grant had gained the Strand again, but the man was gone. Busses came and went, taxis floated by, shops were open all up and down the street. The choice of a means of escape was not wanting. Grant cursed, and even as he cursed he thought, Well, he fooled me very neatly, but I expect he's cursing harder than I am for being such a fool as to show that he knew me. That was a very bad break. And for the first time he felt pleased with the Press who had made so free with his features in their desire to educate the public. He patrolled the street for a while, casting exploratory but unoptimistic glances into the shops as he passed. Then he withdrew into the shadow of a doorway, where he remained for some time, hoping against hope that the man had gone to ground instead of making a break for it, and would reappear when he thought the coast was clear. The only result of that was that an inquisitive policeman who had watched him for some time from across the street wanted to know what he was waiting for. Grant came out into the light and explained the circumstances to the apologetic officer, and, deciding that his man had bolted, went to telephone to the Yard. His first impulse when the man had tricked him and run for it had been to throw a squad into the Strand, but the sight of the swift traffic and the knowledge that by the time any one arrived from the Embankment, even in a fast car, the wanted man might be well on the way to Golder's Green or Camberwell or Elstree, had deterred him. It was hardly an occasion for turning out the force.

As he went slowly up to Trafalgar Square after the business of telephoning, his spirits lightened. For the last hour he had been disgusted with himself to an extent that beggared his vocabulary. He had had the man within six yards of him, and had let him slip through his fingers. Now the lighter side of the situation was becoming apparent. He had made a backward slip certainly, but even at the end of the slip he was further on—much further on—than when he had started. He knew for a certainty that the Levantine was in London. That was a tremendous advance. Until his description had been furnished to the police the previous night there had been nothing to prevent the murderer from leaving London at any moment. They would have had to consider reports from all over Britain—and Grant had bitter experience of such reports of wanted men—and perhaps the Continent, if it had not been for that chance meeting

in the Strand, and the man's lack of self-control in a delirious moment. Now they knew he was in London, and could concentrate their forces. He might leave it by road, but he could not by any other method, and Grant had seen to it that he would have difficulty in hiring a car from any recognized garage. That merely made things difficult for him it did not prevent him from going if he wanted to, but it made his exit considerably slower. It was strange in the circumstances that he had stayed at all when the way was clear. But Grant knew the Londoner's mulish habit of clinging to the town he knows, and the foreigner's rat-like preference of the sewers to the open. Both would be more likely to hide than to run. And of course the wanted man, though his description had not been broadcast, had no guarantee that the police were not in possession of it. It would have required more courage or more foolhardihood than most men possess to face a ticket collector or a boat official in these circumstances. So the man had stuck to the town. From now on he would be at the mercy of a continual patrol of the flying squad, and his chances of slipping through their fingers again were very small. Moreover, Grant had seen him. That was another enormous advance. They could never meet again, even in the distance, without Grant recognizing him.

The Levantine in London, the dead man's friend in London presumably, the Levantine recognizable, the friend about to be traced by his bank-notes—things, as Marcel had remarked, were marching. At the bottom of St. Martin's Lane Grant remembered that this was the last night of *Didn't You Know?* He would drop in there for a little and then go back to the Yard. His thoughts worked much better without goading, and the quiet of the room at the Yard was a silent goad that maddened him. His thoughts would never work to order. There was more likelihood of a revelation being vouchsafed him in the middle of the teeming streets, in the seething mob that somewhere held the Levantine, than in the imposing isolation of his room.

The play had been in progress for about twenty minutes when Grant, after a chat with the manager, found six square inches of standing-room at the back of the dress circle. It was a magnificent sight, looked at from the darkness of so remote a vantage. The theatre, never a very accommodating one, was packed from floor to ceiling, its rosy dimness filled with the electric quality that is only found when every man of an audience is an enthusiast. And they were all enthusiasts, that last-night crowd, devotees saying farewell to the object of their adoration. Adulation, camaraderie, and regret filled the house and made the gathering completely un-British in its abandon to the emotion of the moment. Now and then, when Gollan left out an old gag, some one would call a correction. "Give us all of it, Golly!" they cried. "Give us all of it!" And Golly gave them all he had. Ray Marcable trailed her loveliness over a nearly empty stage with that half-reluctant lightness of a leaf in the wind. She was always, when she danced, a mere fraction of a beat behind the music, so that it seemed as if, instead of being an accompaniment, the music was the motive power, as if it was the music that lifted and spun and whirled her, floated her sideways, and relinquished her gently as it died. Again and again at their vociferous demands the music lifted her into motion, held her laughing and sparkling and quivering, like a crystal ball held poised on a jet of water, and dropped her in a quick descending run to a fast-breathing stillness broken by the crash of the applause. They would not let her go, and when at last some one held her forcibly in the wings, and an effort was made to get on with the story, there was unconcealed impatience. No one wanted a plot tonight. No one had ever wanted one. Quite a large number of the most enthusiastic habitués were unaware that there was such a thing, and few, if any, would have been able to give a lucid account of it. And tonight to insist on wasting time with such irrelevance was folly.

The entrance of the most perfect chorus in Britain soothed them slightly. The fourteen Woffington girls were famous in two continents, and their studies in synchronized motion gave one the same feeling of complete satisfaction—the satisfaction that never becomes satiety—that one has on beholding the Guards in motion. Not a head turned too much, not a toe was out of alignment. No kick was higher than its neighbour, no flop was quicker than another. When the last of the fourteen flicked her black-and-orange columbine skirt in a little defiant motion as she disappeared behind the flats the audience had almost forgotten Ray. Almost, but not quite. Ray and Gollan possessed the house—it was their night, theirs and their public's. And presently the impatience with anything that was not Ray or Gollan became too marked to be ignored. The evening was one long crescendo of excitement that was rapidly reaching hysteria point. Grant watched half pityingly the wry smile with which the leading man acknowledged the conventional plaudits accorded to his sentimental solo. That solo was sung by languishing tenors all over Britain, whistled by every errand boy, played, with lowered lights, by every dance orchestra. He had obviously expected it to be encored at least three times, but beyond humming the last chorus with him they had shown no marked appreciation of it. Something had gone wrong. They couldn't even see him. With as good a grace as he could muster he took his place as background to Ray Marcable, danced with her, sang with her, acted with her—and Grant suddenly caught himself wondering if his eclipse were merely the accident of Ray Marcable's vivid personality, or if she had used that personality deliberately to keep the limelight where she happened to be. Grant had no illusions about the theatre or about the professional generosity of leading ladies. Theatrical stars were easily moved to tears and a lavish expenditure over a hardluck story, but their good nature withered at the fount when confronted with a successful rival. Ray Marcable had a reputation for allround generosity and sweet reasonableness. But then, her press agent was wily beyond the average of that wily race. Grant himself had read "pars" about her which he had not recognized as an agent's work until his eyes had gone on to the next item of interest. He had that supreme quality, her press agent, of making the advertised one's presence in the story entirely and convincingly incidental to the main theme.

And then there was the suspicious fact that she had had three leading men in the two years, whereas the rest of the cast had stayed the same. Could her friendly air, her modesty, her—there was no other word for it—her ladylikeness be camouflage? Was London's fragile darling hard as nails underneath? He visualized her as he had met her "off," unassuming, intelligent, eminently reasonable. No parade of temperament or idiosyncrasy. A charming girl with her head screwed on the right way. It was hardly credible. He had known among crooks many women of the fluffy type who had no softer feelings whatever in their makeup. But Ray Marcable's was a sweetness that had no fluff about it, a sweetness that he could have sworn was genuine. He watched her closely now trying to disprove for his own satisfaction—he had liked her enormously—that suggestion which his mind had thrown up involuntarily. But to his dismay he found his suspicions, now that they were acknowledged and made the subject of investigation, being slowly confirmed. She was keeping the man out of it. When he looked for the indications they were all there, but they were done with a subtlety such as Grant had never witnessed before. There was nothing so crude as trying to share or divert his applause, or even cutting his applause short by an intrusion of her own. All these would have been recognizable for what they were, and therefore, from her point of view, not

permissible. It occurred to him that she was not only too subtle to use such a method but too potent to need to. She had only to use her glowing personality with unscrupulousness, and rivals faded out as stars before the sun. Only with Gollan she was powerless—he was a sun as potent as herself, if not more so—and so she suffered him. But with her leading man—good-looking, amiable, and a very fine singer—she had no difficulty. They had said, he remembered now, that it was impossible to find a leading man good enough for her. That was why. He did not doubt it now. There was something uncanny about the clearness with which he suddenly read her mind, untouched by the glamour that surrounded him. Only he and she in all that intoxicated crowd were aloof, were poised above emotion and looking on. He watched her play with that unhappy wretch as coldly and deliberately as he would have played a trout in the Test. Smiling and sweet, she took what would have been a triumph from his hands, and tacked it on to her own dazzling outfit. And no one noticed that the triumph had gone astray. If they thought at all; they thought that the leading man was not up to the mark tonight—but, of course, it was difficult to get one good enough for her. And after having absorbed his worth she would at the end of a turn with a Machiavellian acuteness drag him forward by the hand to share the applause, so that every one in the building thought, Well, he didn't deserve much of it! and his inferiority was accentuated and remembered. Oh, yes, it was subtle. This play within a play became for Grant the absorbing entertainment of the evening. He was seeing the real Ray Marcable, and the sight was incredibly strange. So rapt was he that the final curtain found him still at the back of the circle, deafened by the cheers and feeling strangely cold. Again and again, and yet again, the curtain rose on the glittering stage, and the stream of presents and flowers began to flow over the footlights. Then the speeches came; first Gollan, clutching a large square bottle of whisky and trying to be funny, but not succeeding because his voice would not stay steady. Grant guessed that in his mind was a picture of the heartbreaking years of squalid rooms in squalid towns, twice-nightly performances, and the awful ever-present fear of the bird. Gollan had sung long for his supper; it was no wonder that the feast choked him. Then the producer. Then Ray Marcable.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she said in her clear, slow voice, "two years ago, when none of you knew me, you were kind to me. You overwhelmed me then. Tonight you have overwhelmed me again. I can only say thank you."

Very neat, thought Grant, as they cheered her to the echo. Quite in the part. And he turned away. He knew what was coming—speeches by every one down to the callboy, and he had heard enough. He went down through the crimson and buff vestibule and out into the night with a queer constriction in his chest. If he had not in his thirty-five years cast overboard all such impedimenta as illusion, one would have said that he was disillusioned. He had quite liked Ray Marcable.

7—Things Move

"It's not a Christian life at all," said Mrs. Field as she put the inevitable bacon and eggs in front of him. Mrs. Field had tried to cure Grant of the bacon-and-eggs habit by providing wonderful breakfasts with recipes culled from her daily paper, and kidneys and other "favours" wrested from Mr. Tomkins at the threat of withdrawing her custom, but Grant had defeated her—as he defeated most people in time. He still had bacon and eggs, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. It was now eight o'clock on Sunday morning, which was the fact that had called forth Mrs. Field's remark. "Unchristian" in Mrs. Field's vocabulary meant not any lack of conformity but an absence of comfort and respectability. The fact that he was having breakfast before eight on a Sunday morning shocked her infinitely more than the fact that his day was to be spent in the most mundane of work. She grieved over him.

"It's a wonder to me that the King doesn't give you inspectors decorations oftener than he does. What other man in London is having breakfast at this hour when he needn't!"

"In that case I think inspectors' landladies should be included in the decoration. Mrs. Field, O.B.E.—for being an inspector's landlady."

"Oh, the honour's enough for me without the decoration," she said.

"I'd like to think of a good rejoinder to that, but I never could say graceful things at breakfast. It takes a woman to be witty at eight in the morning."

"You'd be surprised really at the standing it gives me, you being an inspector at Scotland Yard."

I "Does it really?"

"It does; but don't you be afraid. I keep my mouth shut. Nothing ever comes out through me. There's lots would like to know what the inspector thought, or who came to see the inspector, but I just sit and let them hint. You don't have to see a hint unless you like."

"It is very noble of you, Mrs. Field, to achieve a reputation for obtuseness for my sake."

Mrs. Field blinked and recovered herself. "It's my duty, if it wasn't my pleasure," she said, and made a graceful exit.

As he was going away after breakfast she surveyed the untouched toast sorrowfully. "Well, see that you have a good meal in the middle of the day. You can't think to any advantage on an empty stomach."

"But you can't run to any advantage on a full one!"

"You'll never have to run very far after any one in London. There's always some one to head them off."

Grant was smiling to himself as he went down the sunny road to the bus-stop at this simplification of the work of the C.I.D. But there was no heading off the people who claimed to have seen the wanted man. Nearly half London appeared to have set eyes on him—his back as often as not. And the number of cut hands that required investigation would have been incredible to any one who has not witnessed a manhunt from the inside. Patiently Grant sifted the reports through the long, bright morning, sitting at his desk and sending his lieutenants out here and there as a general arranges his forces on a battle-field. The provincial clues he ignored, with the exception of two, which were too good to be passed over—there was always the odd chance that the man in the Strand had *not* been the Levantine. Two men were sent to investigate these—one to Cornwall and one to York. All day long the telephone at his elbow buzzed, and all day long messages of failure came over it. Some of the men they had been sent out to observe had not, in the detective's opinion, the remotest resemblance to the wanted man. This valuable information was obtained often enough at the cost of a long afternoon's vigil behind the Nottingham lace curtains of a suburban villa waiting for "the man three houses down" to pass within examining distance. One suspect proved to be a nobleman well known to the public as a polo player. The officer who tracked him down saw that he had aroused the earl's curiosity—the noble lord had been run to earth in a garage where he was collecting his car preparatory to having a little flip of three or four hundred miles as a slight Sunday diversion—and confessed what his business was.

"I *thought* you were tailing me," said the peer of the realm, "and as my conscience is particularly good at the moment I wondered what you were up to. I have been accused of many things in my short time, but never of looking like a murderer before. Good luck to you, by all means."

"Thank you, sir, same to you. I hope your conscience will be as clear when you come back." And the earl, who had more convictions for exceeding the speed limit than any one else in England, had grinned appreciatively.

Truly it was the men who went out that found work light that Sunday, and it was Grant, sitting pulling strings with mechanical competence, that found it tedious. Barker came in in the afternoon, but had no suggestion to make which might expedite matters. They could afford to ignore nothing; the least helpful of the clues had to be investigated in the relentless process of elimination. It was spadework, and most unchristian, in the Field sense. Grant looked enviously from his window, through the bright mist that hung over the river, at the Surrey side, lit now by the westering sun. How good it would be to be in Hampshire today! He could see the woods on Danebuny in their first green. And a little later in the evening, when the sun went, the Test would be just right for fly.

It was late when Grant got home, but he had not left an avenue of exploration untrodden. With the coming of evening the spate of reported appearances had gradually diminished and died away. But as he ate his supper—to Mrs. Field a meal was a necessary concomitant to a homecoming—he was wearily conscious of the telephone by the fireplace. He went to bed and dreamed that Ray Marcable called him by telephone and said, "You'll never find him, never, never!" She kept repeating the phrase, unheeding of his pleas for information and help, and he wished that the exchange girl would say "Time up" and release him. But before that relief had come the telephone had turned into a fishing-rod without exciting any surprise on his part, and he was using it, not as a fishing-rod but as a whip to encourage the four-in-hand which he was driving down a street in Nottingham. At the end of the street was a marsh, and in front of the marsh, and exactly in the middle of the street, stood the waitress from the hotel. He tried to call out to her as the horses advanced, but his voice died in his throat. Instead, the waitress grew bigger and bigger, until she filled the whole street. As the horses were about to charge into her she had grown so that she towered over Grant and overwhelmed him, the horses, the street, and everything. He had that sense of inevitability which attends the moment of a catastrophe. It's come, he thought, and woke to thankful consciousness of a safe pillow and a reasonable world where there was motive before action. Damn that cheese souffle! he thought,

and, turning on his back, surveyed the dark ceiling and let his now wide-awake brain go its own way.

Why had the man hidden his identity? Was it perhaps mere accident? Nothing but the tailor's name had been obliterated from his clothes, and the makers' name had been left on the tie-surely a most obvious place if one had been deliberately eliminating identification marks. But if it were a mere accident that eliminated the tailor's name, how account for the scantiness of the man's belongings? Small change, a handkerchief, and a revolver. Not even a watch. It spoke loudly of intended suicide. Perhaps the man was broke. He didn't look it, but that was no criterion. Grant had known many paupers who looked like millionaires, and beggars with large bank balances. Had the man, at the end of his resources, decided to end it rather than sink slowly into the gutter? Had the visit to the theatre with his last few shillings been merely a snapping of fingers in the face of the gods who had defeated him? Was it merely the final irony that the dagger had anticipated his own revolver by an hour or two? But if he were broke, why had he not gone to the friend for money—the friend who was so free with his bank-notes? Or had he? and the friend had refused it? Was it conscience, after all, that had prompted that anonymous twenty-five pounds? If he decided to accept the presence of the revolver and the absence of clues as evidence of intended suicide, then the murder resolved itself into the outcome of a quarrel—probably between two members of a race gang. Perhaps the Levantine had shared in the dead man's downfall and had held the dead man responsible. That was the most reasonable explanation. And it fitted all the circumstances. The man was interested in racing—probably a bookmaker—he was found without watch or money and evidently prepared for suicide; the Levantine was heard to demand something which the dead man either could not or would not give, and the Levantine had stabbed him. The friend who had refused him help in life—probably tired of pulling him out of tight places—had been seized with such a fit of remorse on learning of the man's end that he had provided lavishly, if anonymously, for his burial. Pure theory, but it fitted—almost! There was one corner where no amount of insinuation would make it fit. It did not explain why no one had come forward to claim the dead man. If the affair were merely a quarrel between two men, intimidation was washed out as a theory for the silence of his friends. It was not credible that the foreigner had them all in such a state of subjection that not one of them risked even that usual method of the craven and the circumspect, the anonymous communication. It was a curious and almost unique situation. Never in all Grant's experience had a murderer been on the point of being captured before the identity of his victim had been established.

A light rain felt across the window-pane with stealthy fingers. The end of the good weather, thought Grant. A silence followed, dark and absolute. It was as if an advance guard, a scout, had spied out the land and gone away to report. There was the long, far-away sigh of the wind that had been asleep for days. Then the first blast of the fighting battalions of the rain struck the window in a wild rattle. The wind tore and raved behind them, hounding them to suicidal deeds of valour. And presently the drip, drip from the roof began a constant gentle monotone beneath the wild symphony, intimate and soothing as the tick of a clock. Grant's eyes closed to it, and before the squall had retreated, muttering into the distance, he was asleep.

But in the morning, a grey morning veiled in dispirited drizzle, the theory still looked watertight—with judicious plugging at the weak spot, and it was not until, hard on the track of the dead man's friend, he was interviewing the manager of the Adelphi branch of the Westminster Bank that he found his nicely made house of cards pattering round his ears.

The agent was a quiet, grey man whose unluminous skin had somehow taken on the appearance of a banknote. In his manner, however, he was more like a general practitioner than a financial adviser. Grant found himself momentarily expecting to feel Mr. Dawson's dry fingertips on his wrist. But Mr. Dawson this morning was a mixture of Mercury and Juggernaut. This was his report.

The five notes in which the inspector was interested had all of them been paid over the counter on the 3rd of the month as part of a payment of two hundred and twenty-three pounds ten shillings. The money had been drawn by a client of theirs who had a running account in the bank. His name was Albert Sorrell, and he ran a small bookmaker's business in Minley Street. The sum drawn represented the whole of the money deposited with them except a pound, which had been left presumably with the intention of keeping the account open.

Good! thought Grant; the friend is a bookmaker too.

Had Mr. Dawson known Mr. Sorrell by sight? he asked.

No, not very well, but his cashier would be able to tell the inspector all about him; and he summoned the cashier. "This is Inspector Grant from Scotland Yard. He wants a description of Mr. Albert Sorrell, and I have told him that you will provide him with one."

The cashier provided a very telling one. With a minuteness that defeated any hope of a mistake, he described the dead man.

When he had finished, Grant sat thinking at top speed. What did it mean? Had the dead man owed the money to the friend, and had the friend taken all he possessed and afterwards been seized with a too tardy charity? Was that how the notes had come into the friend's possession? On the 3rd, too. That was ten days before the murder.

Did Sorrell draw the money himself? he asked.

No, the cashier said; the cheque had been presented by a stranger. Yes, he remembered him. He was very dark, thin, medium height or a little under, with high cheekbones. Foreign-looking, a little.

The Levantine!

Grant was seized with a mixture of exhilaration and breathlessness—rather as Alice must have felt during her express journey with the Red Queen. Things marched, but at what a bat!

He asked to see the cheque, and it was produced. "You don't think that this is a forgery?" Such a thought had not occurred to them. Both the amount and the signature had been made out in Mr. Sorrell's handwriting, and that was unusual in an attempt at forgery. They brought out other cheques of the dead man's, and exhibited them. They refused to entertain the thought that the cheque was not genuine. "If it is a forgery," Mr. Dawson said, "it is incredibly good. Even if it were *proved* a forgery, I should have difficulty in believing it. I think you may take it that it is a genuine cheque."

And the foreigner had drawn it. The foreigner had had all Sorrell's deposit with the exception of twenty shillings. And ten days later he had stuck Sorrell in the back. Well, if it proved nothing else, it proved the existence of a relationship between the two men which would be useful when it came to evidence in a court of law.

"Have you the numbers of the rest of the notes handed over in the money to Sorrell?" They had, and Grant took a list of them. Then he inquired what Sorrell's address was, and was told that they had no home address, but that his office was at 32 Minley Street, off

Charing Cross Road.

As Grant walked up to Minley Street from the Strand he began to digest the news. The Levantine had drawn the money with a cheque made payable to Sorrell and endorsed by Sorrell. Theft seemed to be ruled out by the fact that Sorrell had made no fuss in the ten days intervening between the paying out of the money and his death. Therefore the cheque had been given to the foreigner by Sorrell himself. Why had it not been made payable to the foreigner? Because it had been a transaction in which the Levantine had no intention of letting his name appear. Had he been "bleeding" Sorrell? Had his asking for something, which Raoul Legarde had reported as being the tenor of their conversation on the night of the murder, been but a further demand for money? Had the Levantine been not an unlucky companion in Sorrell's ruin but the means of it? At least that transaction over the counter of the Westminster Bank explained Sorrell's pennilessness and intended suicide.

Then who had sent the twenty-five pounds? Grant refused to believe that the man who had had all Sorrell had, and who had stuck him in the back at not getting more, would have disbursed such a sum for so slight a reason. There was some one else. And the some one else knew the Levantine well enough to be in receipt of at least twenty-five pounds of the amount that the Levantine had received from Sorrell. Moreover, the some one else and the dead man had lived together, as witnessed by the dead man's fingerprints on the envelope which had contained the twenty-five pounds. The sentimentality of the action and the lavishness of the amount spoke of a woman, but the handwriting people had been very sure that the printing was a man's work. And of course that some one else had also owned the gun with which Sorrell had contemplated putting an end to himself. It was a pretty tangle, but at least it was a tangle—closely related and growing closer, so that at any moment he might pick up a lucky thread which, when pulled, would unravel the whole thing. It seemed to him that he had only to find out about the dead man's habits and life generally and he would have the Levantine.

Minley Street has, in common with the lesser turnings off Charing Cross Road, that half secretive, half disgruntled air that makes it forbidding. A stranger turning into it has an uncomfortable feeling of being unwelcome, as if he had blundered unwittingly into private property; he feels as a newcomer feels in a small café under the half surprised, half resentful scrutiny of the habitués. But Grant, if he was not an habitué of Minley Street, was at least no stranger to it. He knew it as most of the Yard know the purlieus of Charing Cross Road and Leicester Square. If the outwardly respectable but sly faces of the houses said anything to him, it was "Oh, here again, are you?" At 32 a painted wooden notice announced that on the first floor were the offices of Albert Sorrell, Turf Accountant, and Grant turned in at the doorway and climbed the dim stairs smelling of the charwoman's Monday-morning ministrations. The stairs came to a pause at a wide landing, and Grant knocked at the door which had Sorrell's name on it. As he expected, there was no answer. He tried the door, and found it locked. He was about to turn away, when there was a stealthy sound from inside. Grant knocked again loudly. In the subsequent pause he could hear the loud hum of the distant traffic and the footsteps of the people below on the street, but no sound came from inside the room. Grant bent to the keyhole. There was no key in it, but the view he obtained was not extensive—the corner of a desk and the top of a coal-scuttle. The room he was looking into was the back one of the two which had evidently constituted Sorrell's offices. Grant stayed where he was for a little, motionless and expectant, but nothing living crossed the small still-life picture that the keyhole framed. He rose to go away, but, before he had taken the first step, again there was that stealthy sound. As Grant cocked his head the better to listen, he became aware that over the banister of the floor above hung an inverted human head, grotesque and horrible, its hair spread round it by the force of gravity into a Struwwelpeter effect.

Finding itself observed, the head said mildly, "Are you looking for some one?"

"The evidence points that way, doesn't it?" said Grant nastily. "I'm looking for the man who has these offices."

"Oh?" said the head, as if this were an entirely new idea. It disappeared, and a moment later appeared right way up in its proper place as part of a young man in a dirty painter's smock, who came down the last flight to the landing, smelling of turpentine and smoothing down his mop of hair with paint-covered fingers.

"I don't think that man's been here for quite a while now," he said. "I have the two floors above—my rooms and my studio—and I used to pass him on the stairs and hear his—his—I don't know what you call them. He was a bookie, you know."

"Clients?" suggested Grant.

"Yes. Hear what I presume were his clients coming sometimes. But I'm sure it's more than a fortnight since I saw or heard him."

"Did he go to the course, do you know?" Grant asked.

"Where's that?" asked the artist.

"I mean, did he go to the races every day?"

The artist did not know.

"Well, I want to get into his offices. Where can I get a key?"

The artist presumed that Sorrell had the key. The agent for the property had an office off Bedford Square. He could never remember the name of the street or the number, but he could find his way there. He had lost the key of his own room or he would have offered it for a trial on Sorrell's door.

"And what do you do when you go out?" asked Grant, curiosity for a moment overcoming his desire to get behind the locked door.

"I just leave it unlocked," said this happy wight. "If any one finds anything in my rooms worth stealing, they're cleverer than I am."

And then suddenly, apparently within a yard of them and just inside the locked door, that stealthy sound that was hardly sound—merely a heard movement.

The artist's eyebrows disappeared into the Struwwelpeter hair. He jerked his head at the door and looked interrogatively at the inspector. Without a word Grant took him by the arm and drew him down the stairs to the first turn. "Look here," he said, "I'm a plain-clothes man—know what that is?" for the artist's innocence as to courses had shaken any faith he might have had in his worldly knowledge. The artist said, "Yes, a bobby," and Grant let him away with it. "I want to get into that room. Is there a yard at the back where I can see the window of the room?"

There was, and the artist led him to the ground floor and through a dark passage to the back of the house, where they came out into a little bricked yard that might have been part of a village inn. A low outhouse with a lead roof was built against the wall, and directly above it was the window of Sorrell's office. It was open a little at the top and had an inhabited air.

"Give me a leg up," said Grant, and was hoisted onto the roof of the outhouse. As he drew his foot from the painty clasp of his assistant, he said, "I might tell you that you are conniving at a felony. This is house-breaking and entirely illegal."

"It is the happiest moment of my life," the artist said. "I have always wanted to break the law, but a way has never been vouchsafed me. And now to do it in the company of a policeman is joy that I did not anticipate my life would ever provide."

But Grant was not listening to him. His eyes were on the window. Slowly he drew himself up until his head was just below the level of the window-sill. Cautiously he peered over. Nothing moved in the room. A movement behind him startled him. He looked around to see the artist joining him on the roof. "Have you a weapon," he whispered, "or shall I get you a poker or something?" Grant shook his head, and with a sudden determined movement flung up the lower half of the window and stepped into the room. Not a sound followed but his own quick breathing. The wan, grey light lay on the thick dust of a deserted office. But the door facing him, which led into the front room, was ajar. With an abrupt three steps he had reached and thrown it open. And as he did so, out of the second room with a wail of terror sprang a large black cat. It cleared the rear room at a bound and was through the open window before the inspector recognized it for what it was. There was an agonized yell from the artist, a clatter and a crash. Grant went to the window, to hear queer choked moans coming from the yard below. He slid hastily to the edge of the outhouse and beheld his companion in crime sitting on the grimy bricks, holding his evidently painful head, while his body was convulsed in the throes of a still more painful laughter. Reassured, Grant went back to the room for a glance at the drawers of Sorrell's desk. They were all empty—methodically and carefully cleared. The front room had been used as another office, not a living-room. Sorrell must have lived elsewhere. Grant closed the window and, sliding down the lead roof, dropped into the yard. The artist was still sobbing, but had got the length of wiping his eyes.

"Are you hurt?" Grant asked.

"Only my ribs," said Struwwelpeter. "The abnormal excitation of the intercostal muscles has nearly broken them." He struggled to his feet.

"Well, that's twenty minutes wasted," said Grant, "but I had to satisfy myself." He followed the hobbling artist through the dark passage again.

"No time is wasted that earns such a wealth of gratitude as I feel for you," said Struwwelpeter. "I was in the depths when you arrived. I can never paint on Monday mornings. There should be no such thing. Monday mornings should be burnt out of the calendar with prussic acid. And you have made a Monday morning actually memorable! It is a great achievement. Sometime when you are not too busy breaking the law, come back, and I'll paint your portrait. You have a charming head."

A thought occurred to Grant. "I suppose you couldn't draw Sorrell from memory?"

Struwwelpeter considered. "I think I could," he said. "Come up a minute." He led Grant into the welter of canvases, paints, lengths of stuff, and properties of all kinds which he called his studio. Except for the dust it looked as though a flood had passed and left the contents of the room in the haphazard relationships and curious angles that only receding water can achieve. After some flinging about of things that might be expected to be concealing something, the artist produced a bottle of Indian ink, and after another search a fine brush. He made six or seven strokes with the brush on a blank sheet of a sketching block, considered it critically, and having torn it from the block handed it over to Grant.

"It isn't quite correct, but it's good enough for an impression," he said.

Grant was astonished at the cleverness of it. The ink was not yet dry on the paper, but the artist had brought the dead man to life. The sketch had that slight exaggeration of characteristics that is halfway to caricature, but it lived as no photographic representation could have done. The artist had even conveyed the look of half-anxious eagerness in the eyes which Sorrell's had presumably worn in life. Grant thanked him heartfeltly and gave him his card.

"If there is ever anything I can do for you, come and see me," he said, and went away without waiting to see the altering expression on Struwwelpeter's face as he took in the significance of the card.

Near Cambridge Circus are the palatial offices of Laurence Murray—Lucky-Folk-Bet-With-Laury Murray—one of the biggest bookmakers in London. As Grant was going past on the other side of the street, he saw the genial Murray arrive in his car and enter the offices. He had known Laury Murray fairly well for some years, and he crossed the street now and followed him into the shining headquarters of his greatness. He sent in his name and was led through a vast wilderness of gleaming wood, brass, and glass partitions and abounding telephones to the sanctum of the great man, hung round with pictures of great thoroughbreds.

"Well," said Murray, beaming on him, "something for the National, is it? I hope to goodness it isn't Coffee Grounds. Half Britain seems to want to back Coffee Grounds today."

But the inspector denied any intention of losing money even on such an attractive proposition as Coffee Grounds seemed to be.

"Well, I don't suppose you've come to warn me about ready-money betting?"

The inspector grinned. No; he wanted to know if Murray had ever known a man called Albert Sorrell.

"Never heard of him," said Murray. "Who is he?"

He was a bookmaker, Grant thought. "Course?"

Grant did not know. He had an office in Minley Street.

"Silver ring, probably," said Murray. "Tell you what. If I were you, I should go down to Lingfield today, and you can see all the silver-ring men in one fell swoop. It'll save you a lot of touting round."

Grant considered. It was by far the quickest and most logical method, and it had the additional advantage of offering him a knowledge of Sorrell's business associates which the mere obtaining of his home address would not have done.

"Tell you what," Murray said again as he hesitated, "I'll go down with you. You've missed the last train now. We'll go down in my car. I have a horse running, but I couldn't be bothered to go down alone. I promised my trainer I'd go, but it was such a beast of a morning. Have you had lunch?"

Grant had not, and Murray went away to see about a lunch basket while Grant talked to the Yard on his telephone.

An hour later Grant was having lunch in the country; a grey and sodden country truly, but a country smelling of clean, fresh, growing things; and the drizzle that had made town a greasy horror was left behind. Grey, wet-looking torn clouds showed blue sky in

great rifts, and by the time they had reached the paddock the pale unhappy pools in the rock-garden were smiling uncertainly at an uncertain sun. It was ten minutes before the first race, and both rings from Grant's point of view were impossible. He pushed down his impatience and accompanied Murray to the white rails of the parade ring, where the horses for the first race were walking sedately round, the looker-on in him loving their beauty and their fitness—Grant was a fairly competent judge of a horse—while his eyes wandered over the crowd in a businesslike commentary. There was Mollenstein—Stone, he called himself now—looking as if he owned the earth. Grant wondered what bogus scheme he was foisting on a public of suckers now. He shouldn't have thought that anything as uncomfortable as a jumping meeting in March would have appealed to him. Perhaps one of his suckers was interested in the game. And Vanda Morden, back from her third honeymoon and advertising the fact in a coat of a check so aggressive that it was the most obvious thing in the paddock. Wherever one looked, it seemed, there was Vanda Morden's coat. And the polo-playing earl who had been shadowed in the hope that he was the Levantine. And many others, both pleasant and unpleasant, all of whom Grant recognized and noted with a little mental remark.

When the first race was over, and the little eddy of lucky ones had surrounded the bookmakers and been sent gloating away, Grant began his work. He pursued his inquiries steadily until the ring began to fill again with eager inquirers after odds for the second race, when he returned to the paddock. But no one seemed to have heard of Sorrell, and it was a rather disconsolate Grant who joined Murray in the paddock before the fourth race—a handicap hurdle—in which Murray's horse was running. Murray was sympathetic, and as Grant stood with him in the middle of the parade ring he mixed adjurations to admire his horse with suggestions for the tracking of Sorrell. Grant wholeheartedly admired the magnificent bay that was Murray's property and listened with only half an ear to his suggestions. His thoughts were worried. Why did no one in the silver ring know Sorrell?

The jockeys began to filter into the ring, the crowd round the rail thinned slightly as people moved away to points of vantage on the stands, lads kept ducking eager heads under their charges' necks in anxiety to intercept the summons that would mean mounting time.

"Here comes Lacey," said Murray, as a jockey came stepping catlike over the wet grass to them. "Know him?"

"No," said Grant.

"Flat-race crack really, but has a go over hurdles occasionally. Crack at that too."

Grant had known that—there is very little between a Scotland Yard inspector and omniscience—but he had never actually met the famous Lacey. The jockey greeted Murray with a tight little smile, and Murray introduced the inspector without explaining him. Lacey shivered slightly in the damp air.

"I'm glad it's not fences," he said, with mock fervour. "I'd just hate to be emptied into the water today."

"Bit of a change from heated rooms and all the coddling," said Murray.

"Been in Switzerland?" asked Grant conversationally, remembering that Switzerland was the winter Mecca of flat-race jockeys.

"Switzerland!" repeated Lacey in his drawling Irish voice. "Not me. I've had measles. Measles—if you'd believe it! Nothing but milk for nine days and a whole month in bed." His pleasant, cameo-like face twisted into an expression of wry disgust.

"And milk is so fattening," laughed Murray. "Talking of fat, did you ever know a man called Sorrell?"

The jockey's pale bright eyes trickled over the inspector like twin drops of icy water and came back to Murray. The whip, which had been swinging pendulum-wise from his first finger, swung slowly to a halt.

"I think I can remember a Sorrell," he said, after some cogitation, "but he wasn't fat. Wasn't Charlie Baddeley's clerk called Sorrell?"

But Murray could not recall Charlie Baddeley's clerk.

"Would you recognize a sketch?" asked the inspector, and took Struwwelpeter's impressionistic portrait from his pocketbook.

Lacey took it and looked at it admiringly. "It's good, isn't it! Yes; that's old Baddeley's clerk, all right."

"And where can I find Baddeley?" asked Grant.

"Well, that's rather a difficult question," said Lacey, the tight smile back at his mouth. "You see, Baddeley died over two years ago."

"Oh? And you haven't seen Sorrell since?"

"No, I don't know what became of Sorrell. Probably doing office work somewhere."

The bay was led up to them. Lacey took off his coat, removed a pair of galoshes, which he laid neatly side by side on the grass, and was thrown into the saddle. As he adjusted the leathers he said to Murray, "Alvinson isn't here today"—Alvinson was Murray's trainer. "He said you would give me instructions."

"The instructions are the usual ones," said Murray. "Do as you like on him. He should about win."

"Very good," said Lacey matter-of-factly, and was led away to the gate, horse and man as beautiful a picture as this weary civilization can provide.

As Grant and Murray walked to the stands, Murray said, "Cheer up, Grant. Baddeley may be dead, but I know who knew him. I'll take you down to talk to him as soon as this is over." So it was with a real enjoyment that Grant watched the race; saw the colour that flickered and streamed against the grey curtain of the woods on the back stretch, while a silence settled eerily on the crowd—a silence so complete that he might have been there alone with the dripping trees, and the grey wooded countryside, and the wet grass; saw the long struggle in the straight and the fighting finish, with Murray's bay second by a length. When Murray had seen his horse again and congratulated Lacey, he led Grant into Tattersalls and introduced him to an elderly man, with the rubicund face of the man who drives mail coaches through the snow on Christmas cards. "Thacker," he said, "You knew Baddeley. What became of his clerk, do you know?"

"Sorrell?" said the Christmas-card man. "He set up for himself. Has an office in Minley Street."

"Does he come to the course?"

"No, don't think so. Just has an office. Seemed to be doing quite well last time I saw him."

"How long ago was that?"

"Oh, long time."

"Do you know his home address?" asked Grant.

"No. Who wants him? He's a good boy, Sorrell."

The last irrelevance seemed to suggest suspicion, and Grant hastened to assure him that no harm was intended Sorrell. At that Thacker put his first and second fingers into either corner of his mouth and emitted a shrill whistle in the direction of the railings at the edge of the course. From the crowd of attentive faces which this demonstration had turned towards him he selected the one he wanted. "Joe," he said in stentorian tones, "Let me speak to Jimmy a minute, will you?" Joe detached his clerk, as one detaches a watch and chain, and presently Jimmy appeared a clean, cherubic youth with an amazing taste in linen.

"You used to be pally with Bert Sorrell, didn't you?" asked Thacker.

"Yes, but I haven't seen him for donkey's years."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Well, when I knew him he had rooms in Brightling Crescent, off the Fulham Road. I've been there with him. Forget the number, but his landlady's name was Everett. He lived there for years. Orphan he was, Bert."

Grant described the Levantine, and asked if Sorrell was ever friendly with a man like that.

No, Jimmy had never known him in such company, but then, as he pointed out, he hadn't seen him for donkey's years. He had dropped out of the regular crowd when he started on his own, though he sometimes went racing for his own amusement or perhaps to pick up information.

Through Jimmy, Grant interviewed two more people who had known Sorrell; but neither could throw any light on Sorrell's companions. They were self-absorbed people, these bookmakers, looking at him with a vague curiosity and obviously forgetting all about him the minute their next bet was booked. Grant announced to Murray that he had finished, and Murray, whose interest had waned with the finish of the handicap hurdle, elected to go back to town at once. But as the car slid slowly out of the press Grant turned with a benedictory glance at the friendly little course which had provided him with the information he sought. Pleasant place. He would come back some day when he had no business on his mind to bother him, and make an afternoon of it.

On the way up to town Murray talked amiably of the things he was interested in: bookmakers and their clannishness. "They're like Highlanders," he said. "They may squabble among themselves, but if an outsider butts into the scrap, it's a case of tartan against all." Horses and their foibles; trainers and their morals; Lacey and his wit. Presently he said, "How's the queue affair getting along?"

Very well, Grant said. They would make an arrest in a day or two if things continued to go as well as they were doing.

Murray was silent for a little. "I say, you don't want Sorrell in connexion with that, do you?" he asked diffidently.

Murray had been extraordinarily decent. "No," said Grant. "It was Sorrell who was found dead in the queue."

"Great heavens!" said Murray, and digested the news in silence for some time. "Well, I'm sorry," he said at last. "I never knew the fellow, but every one seems to have liked him."

And that was what Grant had been thinking too. Bert Sorrell, it seemed, had been no villain. Grant longed more than ever to meet the Levantine.

8—Mrs. Everett

Brightling Crescent was a terrace of red-brick three-story houses of the Nottingham lace and pot-plant type of decoration. Their stone steps were coaxed into cleanliness and hideousness by liberal applications of coloured pipeclay. Some blushed at finding themselves so conspicuous, some were evidently jaundiced by the unwelcome attention, and some stared in pallid horror as at an outrage. But all of them wore that *Nemo me impune lacessit* air. You might pull the bright brass bell-handles—indeed, their high polish winked an urgent invitation to do so—but you passed the threshold only at the cost of a wide-stepping avoidance of these constantly refurbished traps of pipeclayed step. Grant walked up the street that Sorrell had trodden so often, and wondered if the Levantine knew it too. Mrs. Everett, a bony, short-sighted woman of fifty or so, herself opened the door of 98 to him, and Grant inquired for Sorrell.

Mr. Sorrell was no longer there, she said. He had left just a week ago to go to America.

So that was the tale some one had told.

Who said he had gone to America?

"Mr. Sorrell, of course."

Yes, Sorrell might have told the talc to mask his suicide.

Had he lived alone there?

"Who are you, and what do you want to know for?" she asked, and Grant said that he was a plain-clothes officer and would like to come in and talk to her for a moment. She looked a little staggered, but took the news calmly, and ushered him into a ground-floor sitting-room. "This used to be Mr. Sorrel's," she said. "A young lady teacher has it now, but she won't mind us using it for once. Mr. Sorrell hasn't done anything wrong, has he? I wouldn't believe it of him. A quiet young man like him."

Grant reassured her, and asked again if Sorrell had lived alone.

No, she said; he shared his rooms with another gentleman, but when Mr. Sorrell had gone to America the other gentleman had had to look out for other rooms because he couldn't afford these alone, and a young lady had wanted to come into them. She was sorry to lose both of them. Nice young men, they were, and great friends.

"What was his friend's name?"

"Gerald Lamont," she said. Mr. Sorrell had been a bookmaker on his own account, and Mr. Lamont was in his office. Oh, no, not a partner, but they were great friends.

"What other friends had Sorrell?"

He had had very few, she said. He and Jerry Lamont went everywhere together. After some strenuous thinking she recollected two men who had once come to the house, and described them well enough to make it certain that neither was the Levantine.

"Have you any photographs of Sorrell or his friend?"

She thought she had some snapshots somewhere, if the inspector wouldn't mind waiting while she hunted. Grant had had hardly enough time to examine the room before she came back with two amateur photographs of postcard size. "These were taken last summer when they were on the river," she said.

The snapshots had been taken obviously on the same occasion. They both showed the same willowy background of Thames bank and the same piece of punt. One was a photograph of Sorrell in flannels, a pipe in one hand and a cushion in the other. The other was also a photograph of a young man in flannels, and the man was the foreigner.

Grant sat a long time looking at that dark face. The photograph was a good one. The eyes were not a mere shadow as in most snapshots; they were eyes. And Grant could see again the sudden horror that had lit them as they lighted on him in the Strand. Even in the pleasant repose of the moment on the river the eyes had an inimical look. There was no friendliness in the hard-boned face.

"Where did you say Lamont had gone?" he asked matter-of-factly.

Mrs. Everett did not know.

Grant examined her minutely. Was she telling the truth? As if conscious of his suspicion, she supplemented her statement with another. He had got rooms somewhere on the south side of the river.

Suspicion filled him. Did she know more than she was telling? Who had sent the money to bury Sorrell? His friend and the Levantine were one, and the Levantine, who had had two hundred and twenty-three pounds from him, had certainly not sent the money. He looked at the woman's hard face. She would probably write like a man; the handwriting experts were not infallible. But then, the person who had sent the money had owned the revolver. No, he corrected himself; the person who had *posted* the money had had the revolver.

Had either of the men owned a revolver? he asked.

No; she had never seen such a thing with either of them. They weren't that type.

There she was again, harping on their quietness. Was it mere partisanship, or was it a feeble attempt to head him off the track? He wanted to ask if Lamont were left-handed, but something held him back. If she were not being straight with him, that question in relation to Lamont would alarm her immediately. It would give away the whole extent of his investigations. She would give warning and flush the bird from cover long before they were ready to shoot. And it was not vital at the moment. The man of the photograph was the man who had lived with Sorrell, was the man who had fled at sight of him in the Strand, was the man who had all Sorrell's money, and was almost certainly the man of the queue. Legarde could identify him. It was more important at the moment to keep Mrs. Everett in the dark as to how much they knew.

"When did Sorrell leave for America?"

"His boat sailed on the 14th," she said, "but he left here on the 13th."

"Unlucky day!" said Grant, hoping to bring the conversation to a less formal and less antagonistic level.

"I don't believe in superstition," she said. "One day is very like another."

But Grant was thinking hard. The 13th was the night of the murder.

"Did Lamont leave with him?" he asked.

Yes, they had left together in the morning. Mr. Lamont was going to take his things to his new rooms and then to meet Mr. Sorrell. Mr. Sorrell was going down to Southampton with a boat train at night. She had wanted to go to see him off, but he had been very insistent that she shouldn't.

"Why?" asked Grant.

"He said it was too late, and in any case he didn't like being seen off."

"Had he any relations?"

No, none that she had ever heard of. And Lamont, had he any?

Yes, he had a father and mother and one brother, but they had emigrated to New Zealand directly after the War and he had not seen them since.

How long had the two men stayed with her?

Mr. Sorrell had been with her for nearly eight years and Mr. Lamont for four.

Who shared the rooms with Sorrell for the four years previous to Lamont's arrival?

There had been various people, but most of the time it was a nephew of her own, who was now in Ireland. Yes, Mr. Sorrell had always been on good terms with all of them.

"Was he always bright and cheerful?" asked Grant.

Well, no, she said bright and cheery didn't describe Mr. Sorrell at all. That was Mr. Lamont, if he liked. Mr. Lamont was the bright and cheery one. Mr. Sorrell was quiet, but pleasant. Sometimes he'd be a bit mopy, and Mr. Lamont would be extra bright to cheer him up.

Grant, remembering how grateful one is when some one deliberately attempts to take the black dog from one's back, wondered why it hadn't been the other way about, and Sorrell had murdered Lamont.

Did they ever quarrel?

No, never that she had known of, and she would have known quick enough.

"Well," said Grant at last, "I suppose you have no objections to lending me these snapshots for a day or two?"

"You'll let me have them back safe, will you?" she said. "They're the only ones I have, and I was very fond of both of them."

Grant promised, and put them carefully away in his pocketbook, praying that they were covered with valuable fingerprints.

"You're not going to get them into trouble, are you?" she asked again as he was going. "They never did a wrong thing in their lives."

"Well, if that's so, they're quite safe," Grant said.

He hurried back to Scotland Yard and, while the fingerprints on the photographs were being recorded, heard Williams' report of an unproductive day among the bookmaking offices of London. As soon as the snapshots were again in his possession, he repaired to Laurent's. It was very late and the place was deserted. A solitary waiter was absentmindedly assembling the crumbs from a table, and the air smelt of rich gravy, wine, and cigarette smoke. The distrait minion laid away the crumb-scoop and bent to hear his pleasure with that air of having hoped for nothing, and of having the melancholy pleasure of being right, which a waiter presents to the foolhardy one who attempts to dine when others have finished. As he recognized Grant he reassembled his features in a new combination intended to read, "What a pleasure to serve a favourite customer!" but which in reality was unfortunately clear as "Good heavens, that was a bloomer! It's that pet of Marcel's."

Grant asked after Marcel, and heard that he had that morning departed for France in a hurry. His father had died and he was an only son, and there was, it was understood, a matter of a good business and a vineyard to be settled. Grant was not particularly desolated at the thought of not seeing Marcel again. The manners on which Marcel had always prided himself had left Grant invariably slightly nauseated. He ordered a dish, and asked if Raoul Legarde was on the premises and, if so, would he be allowed to come and speak to him for a moment. Several minutes later, Raoul's tall figure, clad in white linen overall and cap, emerged from the screens by the door and followed the waiter diffidently to Grant's table. He had an air of a shy child going up for a prize which it knows it has earned.

"Good evening, Legarde," Grant said amiably. "You've been a great help to me. I want you to look at these and see if you can recognize any of them." He spread twelve photographs roughly fanwise on the table and left Raoul to examine them. The boy took his time—in fact, the pause was so long that Grant had time to wonder if the boy's statement that he would recognize the man he had seen had been merely a boast. But when Raoul spoke there was no hesitation about him.

"That," he said, laying a slender forefinger on the photograph of Sorrell, "is the man who was beside me in the queue. And that"—this time the forefinger descended on Lamont's photograph—"is the man who came to talk to him."

"Will you swear to that?" Grant asked.

Raoul knew all about swearing to a thing this time. "Oh, yes," he said; "I take my oath any time."

That was all Grant wanted. "Thank you, Legarde," he said gratefully. "When you are *maître d'hôtel*, I'll come and stay and bring half the aristocracy in Britain."

Raoul smiled broadly at him. "It may never come," he said, "the *maître d'hôtel*. They offer very much on the movies, and it is easy just to be photographed and look—" He sought for a word. "You know!" he said, and suddenly let his beautiful but intelligent face slip into an expression of idiotic languishing which was so unexpected that some of Grant's duck and green peas went the wrong way. "I think I try that first," he said, "and after, when I grow"—he moved his hands to indicate a corporation—"I can buy a hotel."

Grant smiled benevolently as he watched the graceful figure making its way back to the spoons and the silver-cleaning rags. Typically French he was, he thought, in his shrewd recognition of the commercial worth of his beauty, in his humour, in his opportunism. It was sad to think that *embonpoint* would ever mar his slenderness and his good looks. Grant hoped that in the midst of his adipose tissue he would keep his humour. When he himself got back to the Yard it was to obtain a warrant for the arrest of Gerald Lamont for the murder of Albert Sorrell, outside the Woffington Theatre, on the evening of the 13th of March.

When she closed the door behind the inspector, the woman in Brightling Crescent remained for a long time motionless, her eyes on the brown-patterned linoleum that covered the floor of the lobby. Her tongue came out and ran along her thin lips in a contemplative

way. She did not appear agitated, but her whole being seemed concentrated in an effort of thought; she vibrated with thought as a dynamo vibrates. For perhaps two minutes she stood there quite motionless, still as a piece of furniture, in the clock-ticking silence. Then she turned and went back to the sitting-room. She plumped up the cushions which had been depressed by the inspector's weight —she herself had taken the wholly instinctive precaution of seating herself on a hard chair—as if that were the most immediately important thing in life. She took a white tablecloth from a drawer in the sideboard and began to set a meal, coming and going between the sitting-room and the kitchen in an unhurrying deliberation, laying knives and forks exactly parallel in a painstaking fashion that was evidently habit. Before she had finished a key rattled in the lock, and a drab woman of twenty-eight or so let herself in, her greydrab coat, fawn-drab scarf, timidly fashionable green-drab hat, and unexpectant air proclaiming her profession. She removed her galoshes in the hall and came into the sitting-room, with an artificially cheerful remark about the wet day. Mrs. Everett agreed and said, "I was thinking, as it's cold supper, you mightn't mind if I left it set and went out. I'd like to run over and see a friend, if it makes no difference to you." Her boarder assured her that it made no difference whatever, and Mrs. Everett thanked her and retired to the kitchen. There she took from the larder a roast of beef, from which she cut thick slices, and proceeded to make sandwiches. She wrapped them neatly in white paper and put them into a basket. Into the basket with them she put some cooked sausage, some meat lozenges, and a packet of chocolate. She stoked the fire, filled the kettle, and set it on the side of the hearth so that it would be hot when she came back, and proceeded upstairs. In her bedroom she made a deliberate toilet for the street, tucking stray strands of hair carefully under her uncompromising hat. She took a key from one drawer and opened another, withdrew a roll of notes and counted them, and put them into her purse. She opened a blotter worked in canvas and silks and wrote a short note, which she sealed in an envelope and put into her pocket. She came downstairs again, pulling on her gloves, and, taking the small basket from the kitchen table, let herself out at the back door, locking it behind her. She went down the street, looking neither right nor left, her flat back, lifted chin, and resolute walk proclaiming the citizen with a good conscience. In the Fulham Road she waited at a bus stop and took such casual interest in her fellow-attendants as does a woman who knows what is what and keeps herself to herself. So entirely orthodox was she that when she left the bus only the bus conductor, whose power of observation was entirely instinctive, could have said that she had been a passenger. And in the bus that took her to Brixton she was equally inconspicuous; her fellow-travellers noticed her no more than if she had been a sparrow or a lamp-post. Sometime before Brixton became Streatham Hill she got off the bus and disappeared into the foggy evening, and no one remembered that she had been there; no one had been disturbed by the terrific pent urgency that her passive exterior hid.

Up a long street where the street-lamps hung like misty moons she went, and down another its exact replica—flat fronts, foggy lamplight, deserted roadway; along another and yet another. Halfway along this last she turned abruptly and walked back to the nearest lamp-post. A girl hurried past her, late for some appointment, and a small boy came jingling two pennies in his joined palms. But no one else. She made a pretence of looking at her watch in the light and went on again in the original direction. To her left was a terrace of the high, imposing-looking houses which the social descent of Brixton has left high and dry, the plaster peeling in large flakes from the walls, and the variegated window-curtaining proclaiming the arrival of the flat-dweller. Nothing could be seen at this hour of the detail of the mass; only a chink of light here and there and the recurrent fanlights of the doors told of human habitation. Into one of these she disappeared, the door closing softly behind her. Up two flights of stairs, dimly lighted and shabby, she went, and came to the third flight, where there was no light. She glanced up into the dark above and listened. But only the stealthy creaking of the old wood sounded in all the house. Slowly, feeling her way step by step, she climbed, negotiated the turn without a stumble, and came to rest at the top of the house on an unlighted landing, breathless. With the assurance of one who knows her way, she put out her hand to locate the invisible door, and having found it, knocked gently. There was no answer, and no streak of light below the door betrayed a presence beyond. But she knocked again and said softly, with her lips to the crack where the door met the upright, "Jerry! It's me." Almost immediately something was kicked away from inside the door, and it opened to show a lamp-lit room, with a man's figure silhouetted crucifix-wise against the light.

"Come in," said the man, and drew her quickly in and shut the door and locked it. She set her basket on the table by the curtained window and turned to face him as he came from the door.

"You shouldn't have come!" he said. "Why did you?"

"I came because there was no time to write to you, and I had to see you. They've found out who he was. A man from Scotland Yard came this evening and wanted to know all about you both. I did everything I could for him. Told him everything he wanted to know, except where you were. I even gave him snaps of you and him. But he knows you are in London, and it's only a matter of time if you stay here. You've got to go."

"What did you give him the photographs for?"

"Well, I thought about it when I went away to pretend to look for them, and I knew I couldn't go back and say I couldn't fired them and make him believe me. I mean, I was afraid I wouldn't do it well enough. And then I thought, since they had got so far—finding out all about you two—a photograph wouldn't make much difference one way or another."

"Wouldn't it?" said the man. "Tomorrow every policeman in London will know exactly what I look like. A description's one thing and that's bad enough, God knows—but a photograph is the very devil. That's torn it!"

"Yes, it might have if you were going to stay in London. But if you stayed in London you'd be caught in any case. It would only be a matter of time. You've got to get out of London tonight."

"There's nothing I'd like better," he said bitterly, "but how, and where to? If I leave this house, it's fifty to one I walk straight into the police, and with a mug like mine it wouldn't be very easy to convince them that I wasn't myself. This last week's been ten thousand hells. God, what a fool I was!—and for so little reason. To put a rope round my neck for next to nothing!"

"Well, you've done it," she said coolly. "Nothing can alter that. What you've got to consider now is how to get away. And as quickly as you can."

"Yes, you said that before—but how, and where to?"

"Have some food and I'll tell you. Have you had a proper meal today?"

"Yes, I had breakfast," he said. But he did not appear to be hungry, and his angry, feverish eyes watched her unwaveringly.

"What you want," she said, "is to get out of this district, where every one's talking about the thing, to a place where no one's ever heard of it."

"If you mean abroad, it isn't the slightest good trying. I tried to get taken on a boat as a hand four days ago, and they asked if I was Union or something, and wouldn't look at me. And as for the Channel boats, I might as well give myself up."

"I'm not talking about abroad at all. You're not as famous as you think. I'm talking about the Highlands. Do you think the people in my home on the west coast ever heard of you or what happened last Tuesday night. Take my word for it, they haven't. They never read anything but a local paper, and local papers report London affairs in one line. The place is thirty-six miles from a railway station, and the policeman lives in the next village, four miles miles away, and has never seen anything more criminal than a salmon poacher. That's where you are going. I have written a letter, saying that you are coming because you are in bad health. Your name is George Lowe, and you are a journalist. There is a train for Edinburgh from King's Cross at ten-fifteen and you are catching that tonight. There isn't much time, so hurry"

"And what the police are catching is me at the platform barrier."

"There isn't a barrier at King's Cross haven't gone up and down to Scotland for nearly thirty years without knowing that. The Scotch platform is open to any one who wants to walk on. And even if there are detectives there, the train is about half a mile long. You've got to risk *something* if you're going to get away. You can't just stay here and let them get you! I should have thought that gamble would have been quite in your line.

"Think I'm afraid, do you?" he said. "Well, I am. Scared stiff. To go out into the street tonight would be like walking into no-man's-land with Fritz machine-gunning."

"You've either got to pull yourself together or go and give yourself up. You can't sit still and let them come and take you."

"Bert was right when he christened you Lady Macbeth," he said.

"Don't!" she said sharply.

"All right," he muttered. "I'm sort of crazy." There was a thick silence. "All right, let's try this as a last stunt."

"There's very little time," she reminded him. "Put something into a suitcase quickly—a suitcase that you can carry yourself—you don't want porters."

He moved at her bidding into the bedroom that led off the sitting-room, and began to fling things into a suitcase, while she put neat parcels of food into the pockets of the coat that hung behind the door.

"What's the good?" he said suddenly. "It's no use. How do you think I can take a main-line train out of London without being stopped and questioned?"

"You couldn't if you were alone," she said, "but with me it's a different matter. Look at me. Do I look the sort who would be helping you to get away?"

The man stood in the doorway contemplating her for a moment, and a sardonic smile twisted his mouth as he took her in all her upright orthodoxy. "I believe you're right," he said. He gave a short, mirthless laugh and thereafter put no difficulties in the way of her plans. In ten minutes they were ready for departure.

"Have you any money?" she asked.

"Yes," he said; "plenty."

She seemed about to ask a question.

"No, not that," he said. "My own."

She carried a rug and an extra coat: "You mustn't suggest hurry in any way; you must look as though you were going a long journey and didn't care who knew it." And he carried the suitcase and a golf-bag. There was to be no hole-and-corner business. This was bluff, and the bigger the bluff, the more chance there was of carrying it off. As they stepped into the foggy road, she said, "We'll go to Brixton High Street and get a bus or a taxi."

As it happened, it was a taxi that offered itself first. It swelled out of the dark before they had reached a main thoroughfare, and as the man heaved what they were carrying aboard the woman gave the address of their destination.

"Cost you something, lady," said the driver.

"Well, well," she said, "isn't every day my son has a holiday."

The driver grunted good-naturedly. "That's the stuff! Feast and famine. Nothing like it." And she climbed in, and the taxi ceased its agitated throbbing and slid into action.

After a silence the man said, "Well, you couldn't do more for me if I were."

"I'm glad you're nod" she said. There was another long silence.

"What is your name?" she asked suddenly.

He thought for a moment. "George Lowe," he said.

"Yes," she said; "but don't think next time. There is a train north to Inverness that leaves Waverly at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. You'll have to spend tomorrow night in Inverness. I have written down on a paper what you do after that."

"You seem to be perfectly sure that nothing's going to happen at King's Cross."

"No, I'm not," she said. "The police are not fools—that Scotland Yard man didn't believe half I said—but they're just human. All the same, I'm not going to give you that bit paper until the train's going."

"I wish I had that revolver now!" he said.

"I'm glad you haven't. You've made a big enough fool of yourself already.

"I wouldn't use it. It would just give me courage."

"For goodness' sake, be sensible, Jerry. Don't do anything silly and spoil things."

They fell to silence again, the woman sitting upright and alert, the man shrunk in the corner, almost invisible. Into the west of London they went like that, through the dark squares north of Oxford Street, out into the Euston Road and with a sharp left-handed turn into King's Cross. The moment had come.

"You pay the taxi and I'll get the ticket," she said.

As Lamont paid the taxi-man the shadow of his turned-down hat hid his face, so that his retreating back was all that the incurious gaze of the driver noted. A porter came and took his things from him, and he surrendered them willingly. Now that the time had come, his "nerves" had gone. It was neck or nothing, and he could afford to play the part well. When the woman joined him from the booking-office, the change in him was evident in the approbation on her cold face. Together they went on to the platform and followed the porter down it, looking for a corner seat. They made a sufficiently convincing picture—the man with the rug and the golf-bag and the wraps, and the woman in attendance with the man's extra coat.

The porter dived into a corridor and came out again saying, "Got you a corner, sir. Probably have the side to yourself all the way. It's quiet tonight."

Lamont tipped him and inspected his quarters. The occupant of the other side had staked his claims, but was not present other than in spirit. He went back to the doorway with the woman and talked to her. Footsteps came down the corridor at his back, and he said to her, "Have they any fishing, do you think?"

"Only sea-fishing in the loch," she said, and continued the subject until the steps had moved on. But before they faded out of earshot they stopped. Lamont cast as casual a glance as he could achieve down the corridor, and found that the owner of the steps had halted at the open door of his compartment and was examining the luggage on the rack. And then he remembered, too late, that the porter had put his suitcase up with the initials outside. The G. L. was plain for all the world to read. He saw the man stir preparatory to coming back. "Talk!" he said quickly to the woman.

"There's a burn, of course," she said, "where you can catch what they call beelans. They are about three inches long."

"Well, I'll send you a beelan," he said, and managed a low laugh that earned the woman's admiration just as the man Stopped behind him.

"Excuse me, sir, is your name Lorrimer?"

"No," said Lamont, turning round and facing the man squarely. "My name is Lowe."

"Oh, sorry!" the man said. "Is that your luggage in the compartment, then?"

"Yes."

"Oh, thank you. I am looking for a man Lorrimer, and I was hoping that it might be his. It's a cold night to be hanging round for people who aren't here."

"Yes," said the woman; "my son's grumbling already at the thought of his first night journey. But he'll grumble a lot more before he's in Edinburgh, won't he?"

The man smiled. "Can't say I've ever travelled all night, myself," he said. "Sorry to have bothered you," he added, and moved on.

"You should have let me take that other rug, George," she said as he moved out of earshot.

"Oh, rug be blowed!" said George, as to the manner born. "It will probably be like an oven before we've been going an hour."

A long, shrill whistle sounded. The last door was banged.

"This is for expenses," she said, and put a packet into his hand, "and this is what I promised you. The man's on the platform. It's all right."

"We've left out one thing," he said. He took off his hat and bent and kissed her.

The long train pulled slowly out into the darkness.

9—Grant Gets More Information Than He Expected

Grant was studying the morning papers, with his habitual half-careless thoroughness. That is not a paradox; Grant apparently skimmed the paper, but if you asked him about any particular happening afterwards, you would find that he had acquired a very efficient working knowledge of it. He was feeling pleased with himself. It was only a matter of hours before he got his man. It was a week today that the murder had been committed, and to locate the murderer from among a mass of conflicting clues in such a short time was good work. He had been favoured by luck, of course; he acknowledged that freely. If it weren't for luck on some one's part, half the criminals in the world would go unpunished. A. burglar, for instance, was hardly ever convicted except through an outrageous piece of luck on the part of the police. But the queue affair had not been a picnic by any means. There had been spadework galore; and Grant felt as nearly complaisant as it was in him to feel as he thought of the crowd of men working the south of London at this minute, as eager as hounds in cover. He had had his suspicions of Mrs. Everett, but on the whole he had decided that she was telling the truth. The man put on to watch her had reported that no one had come or gone from the house from eight o'clock last night, when he went on duty, until this morning. Moreover, she had produced photographs of the men when there had been no necessity to, and it was quite possible that she did not know her late boarder's address. Grant knew very well the queer indifference that London breeds in people who have lived long in it. The other side of the river to a Fulham Londoner was as foreign a place as Canada, and Mrs. Everett would probably be no more interested in an address at Richmond than she would have been in a 12345 Something Avenue, Somewhere, Ontario. It would convey as little to her. The man Lamont was the one who had been least time with her, and her interest in him was probably less than that which she had for the dead man. He had probably promised in the friendly if insincere warmth of parting to write to her, and she had been content with that. On the whole, he thought that Mrs. Everett was genuine. Her fingerprints were not those on the revolver and the envelope. Grant had noticed where her left thumb and forefinger had held the photographs tightly by the corner, and the when developed proved to be quite new in the case. So Grant was happy this morning. Apart from the kudos arising from the apprehension of a badly wanted man, it would afford Grant immense satisfaction to lay his hands on a man who had struck another in the back. His gorge rose at the contemplation of a mind capable of conceiving the crime.

In the week since the queue murder its sensational value to the Press had been slightly minimized by other important happenings, and though Grant's chief interest seemed to be devoted to apparently unimportant and irrelevant scraps of information like the theft of bicycles, he was amusedly and rather thankfully aware that the most important things in Britain today, judging by the size of the heading that announced them and the amount of space allotted them, were preparations for the Boat Race, the action of a society beauty doctor against a lady who had been "lifted," and the departure of Ray Marcable to the United States. As Grant turned over the page of the illustrated paper and came face to face with her, he was conscious again of that queer, uneasy, unpolicelike movement in his chest. His heart did not jump—that would be doing him an injustice; C.I.D. hearts are guaranteed not to jump, tremble, or otherwise misbehave even when the owner is looking down the uncompromising opening of a gun-barrel—but it certainly was guilty of unauthorized movement. It may have been resentment at his own weakness in being taken aback by a photograph, but Grant's eyes were very hard as he looked at the smiling face—that famous, indeterminate smile. And though his mouth may have curved, he was not smiling as he read the many captions: "Miss Ray Marcable, a studio photograph"; "Miss Marcable as Dodo in Didn't You Know?"; "Miss Marcable in the Row"; and lastly, occupying half the centre page, "Miss Marcable departs from Waterloo en route for Southampton"; and there was Ray, one dainty foot on the step of the Pullman, and her arms full of flowers. Arranged buttress-wise on either side of her were people well enough known to come under the heading "left to right." In either bottom corner of the photograph were the eager heads of the few of the countless multitudes seeing her off who had been lucky enough to get within hailing distance. These last, mostly turned to look into the camera, were out of focus and featureless, like a collection of obscene half-human growths. At the end of the a column describing the enthusiastic scenes which had attended her departure, was the sentence: "Also sailing by the Queen Guinevere were Lady Foulis Robinson, the Hon. Margaret Bedivere, Mr. Chatters-Frank, M.P., and Lord Lacing."

The inspector's lips curved just a little more. Lacing was evidently going to be managed by that clear, cold will for the rest of his life. Well, he would live and die probably without being aware of it; there was some comfort in that. Nothing but a moment of unnaturally clear sight had presented the knowledge of it to himself, and if he went into any London crowd, Rotherhithe or Mayfair, and announced that Ray Marcable, under her charm and her generosity, was hard as flint, he would be likely to be either lynched or excommunicated. He flung the paper away, and was about to take up another when a thought occurred to him, prompted by the announcement of the sailing of the *Guinevere*. He had decided to accept Mrs. Everett's statement as being correct, but he had not investigated her statement that Sorrell was going to America. He had taken it for granted that the America story had been a blind by Sorrell to mask his intended suicide, and the Levantine—Lamont—whether he believed the tale or not, had not sought to alter the supposition of Sorrell's departure. Had he been wise in not investigating it further? It was, at least, unbusinesslike. He sent for a subordinate. "Find out what liners sailed from Southampton last Wednesday," he said; and remained in thought until the man came back with the news that the Canadian Pacific liner *Metalinear* had sailed for Montreal, and the Rotterdam-Manhattan liner *Queen of Arabia*, for New York. It seemed that Sorrell had at least taken the trouble to verify the sailings. Grant thought that he would go down to the Rotterdam-Manhattan offices and have a chat, on the off chance of something useful coming to light.

As he stepped from the still drizzling day into the cathedral-like offices of the Rotterdam-Manhattan a small boy in blue leaped genie-like from the tessellated pavement of the entrance-hall and demanded his business. Grant said that he wanted to see some one who could tell him about the sailings for New York last week, and the urchin, with every appearance of making him free of mysteries and of knowing it, led him to an apartment and a clerk, to whom Grant again explained his business and was handed on. At the third handing-on Grant found a clerk who knew all that was to be known of the *Queen of Arabia*—her internal economy, staff, passengers, capacity, peculiarities, tonnage, timetable, and sailing.

"Can you tell me if any one booked a passage on the *Queen of Arabia* on this trip and did not go?"

Yes, the clerk said, two people had failed to occupy their berths. One was a Mr. Sorrell and the other was a Mrs. James Ratcliffe.

Grant was speechless for a moment; then he asked the date of the bookings. They had been booked on the same day—seven days before the murder. Mrs. Ratcliffe had cancelled hers at the last minute, but they had had no further word from Mr. Sorrell.

Could he see the plan of the cabins?

Certainly, the clerk said, and brought them out. Here was Mr. Sorrell's, and here, three along in the same row, was Mrs. Ratcliffe's. Were they booked separately?

Yes, because he remembered the two transactions quite well. He thought the lady Mrs. Ratcliffe, and he was sure from his conversation with him that the man was Sorrell himself. Yes, he thought he would recognize Mr. Sorrell again.

Grant produced the Levantine's photograph and showed it to him. "Is that the man?" he asked.

The clerk shook his head. "Never saw him before to my knowledge," he said.

"That, then?" asked Grant, handing over Sorrell's photograph, and the clerk immediately recognized it.

"Did he inquire about his neighbors in the row?" Grant asked. But the clerk could recall no details like that. It had been a very busy day that Monday. Grant thanked him, and went out into the drizzle, quite unaware that it was raining. Things were no longer reasonable and understandable; cause and effect, motive and action decently allied. They were acquiring a nightmare inconsequence that dismayed his daytime brain. Sorrell had intended to go to America, after all. He had booked a second-class passage and personally chosen a cabin. The amazing and incontrovertible fact did not fit in anywhere. It was a very large wrench thrown into the machinery that had begun to run so smoothly. If Sorrell had been as penniless as he seemed, he would not have contemplated a second-class journey to New York, and in view of the booking of the passage, contemplated suicide seemed a poor explanation for the presence of the revolver and absence of belongings. It shouted much more loudly of his first theory—that the lack of personal clues had been arranged in case of a brush with the police. But Sorrell had, to all accounts, been a law-abiding person. And then, to crown things, there was Mrs. Ratcliffe's reappearance in the affair. She had been the only one of the people surrounding Sorrell to show marked distress at the time of the murder or afterwards. It was she and her husband who had avowedly been next behind Sorrell in the queue. Her husband! A picture of James Ratcliffe, that prop of British citizenship, swam into his mind. He would go and have another, and totally unheralded, interview with Mr. Ratcliffe.

The boy took in his card, and he waited in the outer office for perhaps three minutes before Mr. Ratcliffe came out and drew him in with a welcoming affability.

"Well, Inspector," he said, "how are you getting on? Do you know, you and dentists must be the most unhappy people in the world. No one sees you without remembering unpleasant things."

"I didn't come to bother you," Grant said. "I just happened to be round, and I thought you'd perhaps let me use your telephone to save me going to a post office."

"Oh, certainly," said Ratcliffe. "Carry on. I'll go."

"No, don't go," said Grant, "there'll be nothing private. I only want to know whether they want me."

But no one wanted him. The scent in South London was weak, but the hounds were persevering and busy. And he hung up with a relief which was rather surprising when one considered the eager frame of mind in which he had set out from the Yard. Now he did not want an arrest until he had time to think things over for a bit. The nightmare of a Scotland Yard officer's whole life is Wrongful Arrest. He turned to Ratcliffe, and allowed him to know that an arrest was imminent; they had located their man. Ratcliffe was complimentary, and in the middle of the compliments Grant said, "By the way, you didn't tell me that your wife had intended sailing for New York the night after the murder."

Ratcliffe's face, clear in the light of the window, was both blank and shocked. "I didn't know," he began, and then with a rush—"I didn't think it was of any importance or I should have told you. She was too much upset to go, and in any case there was the inquest. She has a sister in New York, and was going over for a month just. It didn't make any difference, did it? Not knowing, I mean? It had no bearing on the crime."

"Oh, no," Grant said. "I found it out quite accidentally. It is of no consequence. Is your wife better?

"Yes, I think so. She has not been at home since the inquest. She is at Eastbourne with the other sister the one you met, I think."

Still more puzzled, Grant made his way back to the Yard. He pressed the button on his desk and said to the man who answered it, "I want some one for special work. Is Simpson in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Send him in."

A fair and freckled man of medium height arrived; he had the pleased, alert air of a terrier who is waiting for some one to throw a stone. To him Grant said:

"At 54 Lemonora Road, Golder's Green, live a Mr. and Mrs. Ratcliffe. I want to know what terms they are on—with each other, I mean. Also anything else you can learn about the household. The gossipier the better. I know all about his business, so you needn't waste time on that. It's his home affairs that I want to know about. You can use any method you like as long as you keep within the law. Report to me tonight whether you have got anything or not. Is Mullins in the Yard just now?" Yes, Simpson had seen him as he came up. "Well, send him to me."

Mullins was not freckled, and he looked rather like a verger. "Good morning, sir," he said, and waited.

"Good morning, Mullins. From now until further notice you are a pedlar. You make an excellent Italian, but I think perhaps you had better be British. It is less conspicuous. I'll give you a chit to Clitheroe on Lowndes Street, and he will give you the kind of stock I want. Don't sell more than you can help. And I don't want you to come back here. Meet me in the alley by Clitheroe's in an hour from now. Can you manage it in an hour?"

"I think so, sir. Am I young or old?"

"It doesn't matter. Young to middle-aged. Grey-beards are too theatrical. Don't overdo anything. Respectable enough to travel on a bus if need be."

"Very good, sir," said Mullins, as though his instructions had been to post a letter.

When Grant stumbled across him in the alley in Lowndes Street an hour later, he said, "You're a wonder, Mullins—simply a

wonder. I should never believe you had ever written a report in your life if I didn't know first hand." He looked appreciatively at the Pedlar before him. It was incredible that that slightly drooping figure was one of the most promising men at the Yard. It is very seldom that the C.I.D. resort to disguise, but when they do they do it well. Mullins had the supreme touch that faculty of looking as though he could not possibly be other than he was at the moment. His clothes, even, though obviously third hand, had not that uneasy fit that newly donned garments have. They lay to his shoulders as a much-worn garment does, however ill-fitting.

"Like a trinket, sir?" said Mullins, the pedlar, opening the lid of his wicker tray. On the baize lining lay a collection of articles mostly of cheap Italian manufacture—paper-knives, painted wood ornaments of all sorts, useful and useless, papier-mâché bowls, stucco figures.

"Good!" said Grant. He took from his pocket a thin thing wrapped in tissue paper. As he unrolled the paper he said, "I want you to go to 98 Brightling Crescent, off the Fulham Road, and find out if the woman who lives there has ever seen this before." He laid a silver dagger with an enamelled handle down among the painted wood and the stucco. "Needless to say, it isn't for sale. What's the price of this?" he added, picking up an article.

"Give that to a gentleman like you for one-and-ninepence," said Mullins, without hesitation.

As the passer-by went beyond hearing, Grant continued cheerfully as if there had been no parenthesis. "When you've disposed of the woman in Brightling Crescent—and keep your eyes open generally—go to 54 Lemonora Road and see if any one there recognizes it. Report as soon as you have finished."

When the pedlar of Italian goods reached the back door of 54 Lemonora Road about teatime, a pretty but sapless maid said, "Goodness, here's another!"

- "Another wot?" said the pedlar.
- "Another man selling things."
- "Oh? Bin a lot? Bet they hadn't anything like mine," he said, and opened the tray.
- "Oh!" she said, obviously enraptured. "Are they dear?"
- "Not them. 'Sides, a girl with wages like yours can easy afford something nice."
- "What do you know about my wages, mister?"
- "Well, I don't know anything. I'm just dedoocing. Pretty girl, nice house, good wages."
- "Oh the wages are good enough," she said in a tone that indicated other shortcomings.
- "Wouldn't the lady of the house like to have a look at them?" he said.
- "There's no lady," she said. "I'm the lady of the house just now. The misses is at Eastbourne. You been in the Army?"
- "I was in the Army during the War. That's the only time bin in the Army counts. France? I was four years in France, miss."
- "Well, you can come in and have some tea, and let me see the things properly. We're just in the middle of it."

She led him into the kitchen, where the table was spread with butter, bread, several kinds of jam, and cake. At the table, with an enormous cup of tea halfway to his mouth, was a freckled fair man with a blue muffler and a discharged soldier's silver badge on his lapel. Beside him on the table was a pile of cheap writing-pads.

"This is another ex-serviceman," the maid said. "He's selling writing-paper. I shouldn't think there's much sale for it now. It's ages since I seen some one round selling pads."

"How do, mate?" said the freckled one, meeting the quizzical regard of the pedlar with complete equanimity. "How's trade?"

"Fair. Just fair. You seem to be very comfortable."

"Well, I needed it. Haven't sold a pad today. This country's going to the dogs. It's something to come across some one now and again who has a heart."

"Have some jam," said the maid, pushing his cup of tea across to the pedlar, and he helped himself liberally.

"Well, I'm glad the missus isn't at home in one way, but I'm sorry in another. I thought as how she might buy something, too."

"Well, I'm not sorry," she said. "It's a blessed relief. What with her airs and her tantrums, life isn't worth living."

"Got a temper, has she?"

"Well, I call it temper, but she calls it nerves. And ever since this murder affair—she was in the queue that night the man was murdered, you know. Yes, stood right up against him. And oh, what a to-do! And then she had to go to the inquest and give evidence. If she'd done the murder herself she couldn't have kicked up a bigger fuss about going. The night before she was screaming and howling and saying she couldn't stand it. And when the poor master tried to quiet her down she wouldn't let him go near her. Hurling names at him you Wouldn't use to a dog. I tell you it wasn't half a relief when she went off to Eastbourne with Miss Lethbridge—that's her sister."

"Yes, the best thing they can do when they're like that is to go away for a bit," said the freckled man. "Does she go often?"

"Not so often as I'd like, believe me. She was going to Yorkshire the day after the murder, and then was so upset that she couldn't go. Now she's gone to Eastbourne instead, and long may she stay there, say I. Let's see your stuff," she said to the pedlar.

He jerked his head at the tray. "Have a look for yourself. Anything you fancy you can have cheap. It's a long time since I had a tea like this. Wot say, Bill?"

"Ar," agreed his fellow-itinerant through a large mouthful of cake. "It isn't often people has a heart."

She gloated over the bright-coloured collection awhile. "Well, the missus is missing something," she said. "She's mad on curios and such-like things that hold the dust. Artistic, she is. What's this for?" she said, holding up the dagger. "Murdering people with?"

"An't you ever seen one like that before?" the pedlar said in astonishment. "That's a paper-knife. Same as the wooden ones."

She tried the point absently on a fingertip, and with a queer little shudder of disgust that was quite involuntary she put it down again. In the end she chose a little painted bowl, quite useless but very gay to look upon. The pedlar let her have it for sixpence, and in her gratitude she produced cigarettes of Mr. Ratcliffe's, and while they smoked enlivened them with talk of what was obviously uppermost in her mind the murder.

"We had an inspector of police here, if you'd believe it. Quite nice-looking he was. You'd never say he was a policeman. Not coarse like a bobby. But it wasn't nice, all the same, having him round. Of *course* he was suspicious, with her carrying on like that and not

wanting to see him. I heard Miss Lethbridge say to her, 'Don't be a fool, Meg. The only way to stop him is to see him and *convince* him. You've got to do it.'"

"Well, Eastbourne's a nice place," said the freckled man. "She'll have company there to forget her troubles."

"Ah, she's not one for company much. Always having crazes for some one or other, and then she runs them to death and has some one new. Boys, as often as not. She's queer, she is."

When her talk began to be repetitive instead of informative the freckled man stood up and said, "Well, miss, I ain't had such a tea not in years, and I'm real grateful to you.

"You're welcome," she said. "If you take my advice, you'll give up the writing-pad business. There's nothing in it nowadays. It's old-fashioned. Try stuff like him there—novelty stuff like they sell in the shops at Christmastime."

The freckled man's glance fell sardonically on the dagger among the "Christmas goods."

"You going up the road or down?" he said to the pedlar.

"Up," said the pedlar.

"Well, cheerio, I'll be going. Many thanks again for the tea, miss." And the door closed behind him. Five minutes later the pedlar took his leave.

"If I was you, miss, I wouldn't be so free with my teas," he said. "There's lots of decent chaps on the road, but there's lots of the other kind, too. You can't be too careful when you're alone in the house."

"Are you jealous of the freckly man?" she asked coquettishly and quite unimpressed. "You needn't be. I didn't buy a pad, you know."

"Well, well," said the pedlar, frustrated in his good intentions, and went laggingly down the path to the gate.

By sheer chance he found the freckled man occupying the front outside seat of the bus he boarded.

"Well?" said that worthy cheerily. "Had a good day, mate?"

"Rotten," said the pedlar. "Just rotten. How you been doing?"

"Fair. Isn't it amazing," he said, seeing that the bus-stop behind them was deserted, "what fools these girls are! Why, we could have polished her off and made away with everything in the house, and it never seemed to occur to her."

"I said as much to her when I was going, but she thought I was jealous of you."

"Of me? It should be the other way about. She didn't buy a pad!"

"So she pointed out."

"That was a good stock you had. The boss choose it?"

"Yes."

"Thought so. He's a daisy. What's he nosing out there?"

"Don't know."

"The girl didn't fall for the knife, I noticed."

"No." The pedlar was not communicative.

The freckled one resigned himself.

"Chatty bird!" he remarked, and drawing two cigarettes from the recesses of his person he handed one to his companion. The pedlar cast an idle glance at the maker's name and recognized it as one of Mr. Ratcliffe's. His stern features relaxed into a smile.

"Scrounger!" he said, and held his cigarette to the offered match.

But there was nothing of the freebooter in the reports which Mullins and Simpson presented to Grant an hour later. Simpson said that Mr. and Mrs. Ratcliffe lived on amicable terms, with intervals of very severe squall. Simpson was unable to say whether the squall was started by Mr. Ratcliffe's shortcomings or by Mr. Ratcliffe's resentment of his wife's, since the maid was never present at the beginning of a quarrel. What she heard she heard through a shut door usually. The biggest row had occurred when they came home on the night of the murder. Since then they had not been on friendly terms. Mrs. Ratcliffe had intended to go to Yorkshire the day after the murder, but was too upset to go; and after the inquest she and her sister had gone down to Eastbourne, where she was now at the Grand Parade Hotel. She was a person who took sudden and violent likings for people, and during the time she liked them would be quite unreasonable about them. She had a little money of her own, and was rather independent of her husband.

Mullins said that at 98 he had had difficulty in making Mrs. Everett interested enough to allow him to open his tray. She had insisted that she wanted nothing. When he did uncover his wares, the first thing her eyes had lighted on was the dagger. She had immediately cast a glance full of suspicion at him and had said, "Go away!" and shut the door in his face.

"What do you think? Did she know it?"

Mullins could not say, but it was the sight of it that had made her shut the door like that. She had been going to put up with him until she saw the knife. The maid at Lemonora Road had never seen it before. That he was sure of.

When he had dismissed Mullins and locked away the knife in its drawer again, Grant sat thinking for a long time. This was an unlucky day. There had been no arrest—though he was inclined to think of that as a mixed blessing—there had been the stunning discovery that Sorrell had really meant to go to America, and there had been no trace of the bank-notes handed over to Lamont with the rest of the two hundred and twenty-three pounds, of which the twenty-five sent by the unknown friend had been part. It was seven days since the murder, and the notes had been handed out before that, and not one of them, apart from the twenty-five in their possession, had been traced. Moreover, his two scouts had brought in nothing of importance. In no way could he account for a connexion between Mrs. Ratcliffe and Sorrell. He was inclined to think it sheer coincidence that had put their names together in a ship's list and had placed them together in the queue. Her husband's appearance of shock when Grant had mentioned the departure for New York might have been merely the result of the recollection that he had omitted to tell the inspector of his wife's intended departure. As for Mrs. Everett, her sudden withdrawal spoke more of intelligence than of guilt. Mullins had said that she looked at him suspiciously. She had made no attempt to carry off the situation with a high hand by ignoring the dagger or by wantonly calling attention to it. She had been merely suspicious. He decided to give the Everett woman a few more marks for intelligence and to acquit her of complicity. As for the Ratcliffes, he would temporarily cut them out. They didn't fit, and there was no evidence. Things often fit

to the police satisfaction when there is no evidence whatever, but here things neither fitted nor were backed by evidence, and consequently would have to stand aside. Presently he would find out why Mrs. Ratcliffe had told her maid that she was going to Yorkshire when she intended to go abroad.

The telephone buzzed. Grant took it up with an eagerness of which he was not conscious. It was Williams.

"We've located him, sir. Would you like to come, or shall we carry on?"

"Where is it?" Williams told him. "Have you got the exits all secured? No chance of failure if we hang on for a little?"

"Oh, no sir. We've got him all right."

"In that case meet me at the Brixton Road end of Acre Lane in half an hour."

When he joined his subordinate he asked for details, and Williams supplied them as they went along. He had found his man through the house-agents. Lamont had engaged a furnished top flat—two small rooms—three days before the murder, and had moved in on the actual day of the murder, in the morning.

Yes, thought Grant, that fitted Mrs. Everett's story. "What name did he give?" he asked.

"His own," Williams said.

"What! His own name?" repeated Grant incredulously, and was silent, vaguely troubled. "Well, you've done well, Williams, to run him down so soon. Shy bird, is he?"

"He is," said Williams, with emphasis. "Even yet I can't get any one to say that they've seen him. Shy's the word. Here we are, sir. The house is the fourth in the terrace from here."

"Good," said Grant. "You and I will go up. Got a shooter in your pocket, in case? All right, come on."

They had no latchkey, and there was apparently no bell for the third floor. They had to ring several times before the inhabitants of the ground floor came grumbling to their rescue and admitted them. As they ascended the increasingly shabby stairs in the last of the daylight Grant's spirits rose, as they always did at the point of action. There would be no more pottering round. He was about to come face to face with the Levantine, the man he had seen in the Strand, the man who had stuck Sorrell in the back. He knocked abruptly at the door in the shadows. The room beyond sounded hollow and empty; there was no answer. Again Grant knocked, with no result.

"You might as well open it, Lamont. We're police officers, and if you don't open it we'll have to burst it."

Still a complete silence. "You're sure he's here?" Grant asked Williams.

"Well, he was here yesterday, sir, and no one's seen him since. The house has been under observation since three this afternoon."

"We'll burst the lock, then," Grant said, "and don't forget to stand back when the door goes in." With their combined weight they attacked the door, which gave up the unequal struggle with a groaning crash, and Grant, with his right hand in his pocket, walked into the room.

One glance round him told him the truth, and he suddenly knew that ever since he had arrived on the landing outside he had had a conviction that the rooms were empty. "The bird's flown, Williams. We've missed him."

Williams was standing in the middle of the floor, with the expression of a child from whom a sweet has been taken. He swallowed painfully, and Grant, even in the middle of his own disappointment, found time to be sorry for him. It wasn't Williams' fault. He had been a little too sure, but he had done well to locate the man so quickly.

"Well, he went in a hurry, sir," said Williams, as if that fact were a palliative to his own hurt pride and disappointment. And Certainly there was every evidence of haste. Food was left on the table, drawers were half open and obviously ransacked, clothing had been left behind, and many personal possessions. It was not a methodical getaway, it was a flight.

"We'll go through what he has left behind," Grant said. "I'll test for fingerprints before we have to light the lights. There seems to be nothing but the lamp for illumination." He went round the two rooms with his light powder, but there were few surfaces in the flat on which a print was likely to show clear and unmistakable, and these were so patterned over with prints as to be unproductive. But fairly high up on the varnished wood of the door, where a person's left hand would rest as his right took a coat from the hooks nailed there, were two good prints. A little consoled, Grant lit the lamp and went through the things Lamont had left behind. An exclamation from Williams in the bedroom took him there. Williams was holding a wad of Bank of England notes.

"Got them at the back of this drawer, sir. He did go in a hurry!" Balm was flowing on Williams' excoriated soul. "Won't he be biting bimself!"

But Grant was searching in his own pocketbook, and presently produced a list of numbers, which he compared with those on the notes. Yes, there was no doubt about it, these were the notes that Lamont had drawn with the cheque he had had from Sorrell. And Lamont had been so hurried in his flight that he had actually forgotten a thing so vital. The whole amount was there, except for the twenty-five pounds sent for Sorrell's burial. That was rather extraordinary. Why had the Levantine, as Grant continued to think of him, spent none of it in the ten days between the time he had received it and the murder? There had been no need of fear then, surely. The value of the notes was large, but that was no explanation. The man had drawn the money himself, and could have had the whole amount in Treasury notes if he had so wanted. Why had he spent none of it?

There was little else in the flat to interest them. The man had a catholic taste in literature, Grant thought, looking along the single row of books that adorned the mantelpiece: Wells, O. Henry, Buchan, Owen Wister, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Sassoon's poems, many volumes of the annual edition of *Racing Up-to-Date*, Barrie's *Little Minister*. He took down one and opened it. On the flyleaf, in the writing he had seen on the cheque at the bank, was the owner's name: Albert Sorrell. He took down the others one by one. Nearly all of them had belonged to Sorrell. They had evidently been bequeathed to Lamont by Sorrell on his departure for the United States. Up to the last minute, then, these two men had been friendly. What had happened? Or was it only an outward friendship? Had Lamont always been a snake in the grass?

And now there was the new problem of Lamont's present hiding-place. Where would he be likely to go? He was in a hurry—a desperate hurry. It was no planned affair. That meant that he had probably had to take what refuge came his way. There was no need for them to consider any such possibility as an escape abroad in an elaborate disguise. He had not done that, certainly. He had almost certainly not gone out of London. He would, as he had done before, stick ratlike to the place he knew.

Grant left instructions that the search was to go on as before, and went back to the Yard trying to put himself in the wanted man's

place in the hope of working out a line of flight. It was very late at night, and he was very weary, when at last he found light on the matter. The photographs of the prints he had found on the door were sent to him, and the prints were Mrs. Everett's! There was no doubt of it. That first finger that had left a mark at the back of Sorrell's photograph in the little room at Brightling Crescent belonged to the hand that had leaned against the door in the effort of reaching for something in Lamont's room. Mrs. Everett. Good Heaven! Talk of snakes in the grass! And he, Grant, should really retire. He had got to the stage of trusting people. It was incredible and humiliating, but he had believed Mrs. Everett was being straight with him. His putting a man to watch her had been the merest form. Well, it was a bad break, but he had his line on Lamont now. He would get him through Mrs. Everett. He did not doubt for a moment that it was information furnished by Mrs. Everett that had stirred Lamont into flight. She had probably gone straight to him after he had left her yesterday evening. She was gone before the watcher arrived, but he should have seen her come back; that would have to be looked into; Andrews was careless. And in all probability she had either suggested or provided the new hiding-place. He did not believe that a woman of her intelligence would be fool enough to believe that she could keep Lamont hidden at Brightling Terrace, therefore he had now to find out all about Mrs. Everett and all the ramifications of the Everett family. How should he do it? What was the best avenue of approach to a woman of Mrs. Everett's moated and castellated type? No back-door business, anyhow. She was not a door-gossiper, evidently, and now she was on her guard. That effort to stampede her into a show of emotion had been both futile and ill-advised. He might have known that she wasn't the woman to give anything away in a back-door conversation. Well, what then? In what kind of society, on what kind of occasion, if any, did Mrs. Everett open out? He visualized her in various surroundings, and found her invariably grotesque. And then he suddenly had it. Church! The woman shrieked church-worker. She would be greatly respected by all the congregation, but very slightly unpopular because she kept herself to herself, a quality little beloved by the earnest members of work-parties and such Christian activities who, having provided a titbit such as a rumoured bankruptcy among the flock, expect to be offered a decently sized and tolerably luscious titbit in return. "Church" had placed her, and since she was most certainly not overpopular, her fellow-worshippers would be all the more ready to talk about her.

As Grant's eyes closed in sleep, he was deciding whom to send to investigate Mrs. Everett.

10—The Burst to the North

"Simpson," said Grant, "what were you yesterday when you were gathering information about the Ratcliffes?"

"I was an ex-serviceman with writing-pads, sir."

"Oh, well, you can be an ex-serviceman again today. Very self-respecting, clean, with a collar, not a muffler, and out of a job. I want to know about a Mrs. Everett who lives at 98 Brightling Crescent, off the Fulham Road. I don't want any door-to-door business. She's shy of that, and you must be very careful. She looks as if she attends church. Try that. I think you should find it useful. Bar a club, it's the gossipiest community I know of. I want to know, above all, where her friends and relations live. Never mind her correspondence. I can keep an eye on that myself, and, in any case, I have an idea that that isn't likely to be useful. Mrs. Everett was not born yesterday. Get that into your head and remember it. Don't work faster than you can with safety. If she spots you, it will mean that some one else will have to take over, and a promising line of investigation will be spoiled. The minute you get something, let me know, but don't come back here until you've talked to me on the telephone first."

That was how Mr. Caldicott, the clergyman of the Brightlingside Congregational Church, pushing damply at the mower which jibbed at the tough grass of his front lawn and finding the March sun too prodigal of its blessing, became aware that his labours were being viewed by a stranger with a queer mixture of sympathy and envy. Seeing that he had been discovered, the stranger made a sketchy motion towards his cap, in deference evidently to the cloth, and said, "That's hot work on a day like this, sir. Will you let me take a hand?"

Now the clergyman was young and very fond of showing that he was not above a good day's work. "Do you think I'm not able to do a job like that myself?" he asked, with a strong, brotherly smile.

"Oh, no, sir. It isn't that at all. It's only that I'd be very glad to earn a copper or two for doing it for you."

"Oh?" said Mr. Caldicott, his professional instincts aroused. "Are you looking for work?"

"That's about it," said the man. "Married?"

"No, sir." Simpson was about to add a pious thanksgiving, but stopped himself in time.

"What kind of work are you looking for?"

"Anything.

"Yes, but have you a trade?"

"I can make shoes, sir," said Simpson, thinking he might as well stick to the truth as far as it served him.

"Well, perhaps it would be more sensible if you did the grass and I attended to other duties. Come in and have lunch with me at one o'clock."

But that was not at all what Simpson wanted. The kitchen was his objective, not the parsonical conversation of the dining-room. With a masterly confusion he turned hesitatingly from the mower on which he had already laid zealous hands, and stammered, "If it's all the same to you, sir, I'd rather have a bite in the kitchen. You see—I'm not used to the other kind."

"Come, come," began Mr. Caldicott in brotherly rallying, and Simpson, fearful that his chance of precious gossip was going to be taken from him, could have hit the reverend gentleman.

"Please, sir, if you don't mind—" he said, with such a wealth of conviction in his tone that the clergyman gave way.

"Well, well," he said half testily—had he not exhibited broadmindedness and the true spirit of brotherhood and had them discounted?—"if you really would prefer it." He went away, but before very long he came back, and under pretext of hearing Simpson's history—he catalogued his visitor in a completely unbrotherly fashion as a very respectable fellow—he remained on the pathway until lunchtime, gossiping cheerfully about the things that interested him. He talked about the War—he had been a C.F. at Rouen—about seedlings, and London soot, and shoeleather—this last as being of possible interest to his listener—and the difficulty he experienced in getting young men to come to church. When Simpson found that his last sermon had proved conclusively that God disapproved of betting, and that those who betted committed a sin against themselves, against their neighbour, and against God, he was not particularly surprised at the paucity of Mr. Caldicott's youthful following.

"Now you are young," Mr. Caldicott said. "Can you tell me why young men do not like church?" But Simpson had no intention of leaving the clergyman's house before evening if he could help it, so he refrained from instructing him, and merely shook his head sadly to indicate mournful disapproval. A consciousness of the weekly half-crown that went to enrich the bookmakers instead of the managers of the local Empire made him attack his work with a new zeal, but he was glad when a gong sounded in the house and the clergyman dismissed him with his blessing to the back regions. More than any meal to Simpson was the pursuit of the game he was engaged in.

The clergyman—who, he learned, was a most eligible bachelor—had two maids: a cook-housekeeper and a "help," who looked just like every stage and cinema Tweeny. They were delighted to welcome such a presentable male to their board, and in the hour that he took to his meal, Simpson learned more of lower-class suburbia than he had known in a whole lifetime spent among it. But beyond hearing that Mrs. Everett was a stuck-up widow who gave herself airs because her father had been a clergyman, he learned nothing that he wanted to know. When he asked if her father had been clergyman here, they said oh, no, that it had been somewhere in the north. Some one-horse place, he might be sure. Mrs. Everett went to all the church meetings and things, the cook opined, not because she was keen on church, but just to keep every one in mind that her father had been a clergyman. Revolving this really striking elucidation of human motive, Simpson went back to the garden to resume the mowing which was very nearly finished, and presently the clergyman joined him again. They were having a social meeting in the church hall that evening—would Simpson care to come? Simpson thanked him, and said with sincerity that he would be delighted. In that case there were chairs and such impedimenta to be carried from the church into the church hall—would Simpson like to help with them? If he went down after tea, he would find the ladies' committee preparing for the event. A ladies' committee was the thing above all that Simpson wanted to meet at the moment, and he again expressed his complete willingness, and the clergyman departed.

After an afternoon of border-trimming and gossiping alternately with the cook and the "help," who invented excuses to come and talk to him without apparently caring whether he believed the excuses or not, and a kitchen tea which, though more productive than the previous day's one in Lemonora Road, lacked the spice provided by his colleague's presence, Simpson betook himself to the church. The church he had already located—a red-brick building of a hideousness so complete that it was difficult to believe that it was accidental. The yellowish brown and ultramarine blue of the stained-glass windows was now decently shrouded by the kindly dusk, but evening had its own horror in the brightly lit church hall, where two or three women were rushing about in the aimless, excited fashion of hens, talking much and achieving little, since none of their number did a thing without one of the others suggesting an amendment, which resulted in the committee immediately going into session. Their debates were protracted beyond the limits of an ordinary man's patience by their constant and insincere deferrings to each other, and after Simpson had watched them from the door for a little, very much as he had watched Mr. Caldicott's efforts with a lawn-mower, he came slowly forward, cap in hand, and called attention to himself. "Are you looking for some one?" one of them said, and he explained that Mr. Caldicott had sent him down to assist. He was an immediate success. In fact, he was so sought after that he began to feel inordinately pleased with himself a state of mind which has no business in a member of the Criminal Investigation Department, and which died a sudden death when later in the evening he met his rivals. Reporting them afterwards in camera to Mullins, he used a picturesqueness of phrase which I regret I cannot reproduce, but which left no doubt in Mullins' mind as to the type of men who had attended that "social." Altogether Simpson was rather bitter about that evening, though why he should have been, I cannot fathom. His red-fair hair and freckles were his passport to happiness—no one could resist them; the pink wash that adorned the walls—it was raspberry, with a touch of cochineal—did not presumably hurt him as it might have hurt more sensitive souls; he was by far the most popular male present; and the information he had come to seek was lying about in chunks waiting to be picked up. But the fact remains that, when the ploy was all over and Mullins said to him, "The boss is pleased with you about Brightling Crescent," Simpson's pleasant face twisted in a sneer that did not go with red hair and freckles, and he snarled, yes snarled, "Well, I sweated for it!"

The "social" broke up at the eminently respectable hour of nine-forty-five, and Simpson once more helped the committee to play the game of robbing Peter to pay Paul, and then "saw home" the most gossiping of the females who had been nice to him. So it was on the following morning that Grant interviewed him and heard all that was to be known of Mrs. Everett.

Mrs. Everett was Scotch. Her lack of accent was explained by the fact that she had been for twenty-five years in London, and that initially she came from the West Coast. Her father had been the minister of a Wee Free church in a village on the west coast of Ross, and now her brother was a minister there. Her name was Logan. She had been a widow for fifteen years and had no children. She was not very popular because she kept herself to herself, but she was greatly respected. Not even the fact that she let her rooms to two bookmakers had been sufficient to degrade her in the eyes of the Brightlingside Congregational Church. Sorrell had gone to her on coming out of the Army, and he had not been a bookmaker then, so perhaps she was absolved from any charge of deliberately choosing depravity as a boarder. The two men had not been known personally to any of the church community. They had been regarded from afar, Grant understood, as moral lepers without equal, but the subject of them seemed to have that never-palling attraction that thorough-paced wickedness has for virtue, and no detail of their lives was hidden from people whom the two men had quite certainly not known by sight. The two men, as Mrs. Everett had said—Mrs. Everett, Grant thought, would not lie about something that could be verified!—went everywhere together. Neither had had a "girl." They were both very smart according to Brightlingside standards, and Mrs. Everett waited hand and foot on them. Mrs. Everett had no relations in London that any one knew of, but once a year usually she went to Scotland, and if her boarders happened not to be away, engaged and paid some one to look after them.

When Simpson had taken his burnished presence out of the room, Grant sent for the men who had been on duty at King's Cross and Euston on Monday night, and asked them to describe the suspects they had examined. At the King's Cross man's tale of a young man with his mother, he halted. "Describe the mother," he said, and the man did, quite accurately.

"Were there no other possibles on that train?"

Oh, yes, the man said, several. He inferred bitterly that the original home of thin, dark men with high cheekbones must be the north of Scotland. They swarmed on all northbound trains.

"What made you think he wasn't the man you wanted?"

"His manner, sir. And the woman's. And his case was on the rack, with the initials outside for any one to see—G. L. And he had a golf-bag, and altogether looked too casual."

Well done, Mrs. Everett! thought Grant. It wasn't the man who left the notes in the drawer that thought of the golf-bag. He wondered if leaving the case like that had been deliberate. He could hardly credit that any one would risk unnecessarily the whole success of the thing on such an enormous bluff. It was probably accident.

Where was he going?

There were no labels on his luggage, but the ticket collector had said he was going to Edinburgh.

It did not take Grant long to find out Lamont's probable destination. There were not many Logans in the Church of Scotland, and only one had a church in Rossshire. He was minister of the United Free church in Carninnish—having evidently ratted from the stern faith of his fathers—and Carninnish was a village at the head of a loch on the west coast of the county.

Grant went in to Barker and said, "I'm going fishing in Scotland for a day or two."

"There are more comfortable places than Scotland for hiding your diminished head," said Barker, who knew all about the arrest that had side-slipped.

"May be, but the fishing isn't so good. That's my approximate address. Two days will do me, I expect."

"Taking any one along?"

"No."

"I think you'd better. Think for a moment what a Highland rural policeman is like."

"He can always kill the fish by falling on it—but I don't think it will come to that. I may want some one to take the fish to London, though."

"All right. When are you going?"

"I'm going with the seven-thirty from King's Cross tonight, and I'll be in Inverness before ten tomorrow morning. After that I'll advise you."

"Right!" said Barker. "Good fishing! Don't get stuck on your own hooks."

Grant spent a considerable time arranging for the prosecution of the search in his absence. He had no guarantee that the man who had gone to Carninnish was Lamont. He was going after the suspect himself because he was the only man among the searchers who had actually set eves on the Levantine. But the search in London would go on as usual. The whole departure for Carninnish might be a huge bluff. Grant had a great respect for Mrs. Everett.

As he was getting his fishing tackle together and looking out his old clothes, Mrs. Field came in with sandwiches and commiseration, neither of which Grant felt to be appropriate. He refused the former on the ground that he would have a very good dinner on the train and a very good breakfast, again on the train, in the morning.

"Yes," she said; "that's all very well, but look at the long night there'll be. You never know the minute you'll waken up hungry and be glad of the sandwiches even if it's only to pass the time. They're chicken, and you don't know when you'll have chicken again. It's a terribly poor country, Scotland. Goodness only knows what you'll get to eat!"

Grant said that Scotland nowadays was very like the rest of Britain, only more beautiful.

"I don't know anything about beauty," said Mrs. Field, putting the sandwiches resolutely away in the rug-strap, "but I do know that a cousin of mine was in service there once she went for the season with her people from London—and there wasn't a house to be seen in the whole countryside but their own, and not a tree. And the natives had never heard of teacakes, and called scones 'skons.'"

"How barbaric!" said Grant, folding his most ancient tweed lovingly away in his case.

As the train steamed out of King's Cross he settled down to the study of a one-inch survey map of the Carninnish district. It gave him a pleasant feeling to be studying a map again. There was quite a distinctive thrill in hunting your man in open country. It was more primitive and more human, less mechanized than the soulless machinery that stretched and relaxed noiseless steel tentacles on Thames bank. It was man against man. There would be a telephone only where there was a post office. And there would be no calling out of reserves to head off any one making a break for it. It was your wit against his perhaps your gun against his. But Grant hoped that it would not come to that. There would be little satisfaction in bringing a dead man to justice. And the police, in any case, do not look with favour on summary methods in their detectives. He would have to go about it quietly. After all, he was only two days behind the fair. The man could not have arrived at his destination before last night. The longer he had to settle down in, the less suspicious he would become. At first every boulder would hide a detective for him, but as he grew used to the country—and Grant knew the type of country—its complete severance from any outside interests would have its inevitable effect of giving him a false sense of security.

Grant studied the map. The village of Carninnish lay along the south bank of a river—the Finley—where the river joined the sea in Loch Finley. About four miles to the south, a second loch ran into the land, and on the north shore of it was a village slightly larger apparently than Carninnish, called Garnie. That is, Carninnish lay on the north side of a peninsula and Garnie on the south, the distance between them over the peninsula being about four miles by a hilly and third-class road. Grant decided that he would stay at Garnie—there was an hotel there which he knew from hearsay contained a bath—and from there he would keep an eye on Carninnish under pretence of fishing the Finley. Until late at night he pored over the map, until the country grew as familiar to him as if he had known it. He knew from bitter experience that the very best map-reader has to suffer some severe shocks when he comes face to face with reality, but he had the comfortable knowledge that he now knew the district probably much better than the man he was hunting.

And morning brought him nothing but exhilaration. As he opened his eyes on the daylight, through the open chink at the top of his window he could see the brown moors sliding slowly past, and the chug-chug of the hitherto racing train told of its conquest of the Grampians. A clear, cold air that sparkled, greeted him as he dressed, and over breakfast he watched the brown barrenness with its background of vivid sky and dazzling snow change to pine forest flat black slabs stuck mathematically on the hillsides like patches of woolwork—and then to birches; birches that stepped down the mountain-sides as escort for some stream, or birches that trailed their light draperies of an unbelievable new green in little woods carpeted with fine turf. And so with a rush, as the train took heart on the down grade, to fields again—wide fields in broad straths and little stony fields tacked to hillsides—and lochs, and rivers, and a green countryside. He wondered, standing in the corridor as the train rattled and swerved and swung in its last triumphant down-rush to Inverness, what the fugitive had thought of it all—the Londoner torn from his streets, and the security of buildings and bolt-holes. Sundays on the river would not have prepared him for the black torrents that waited him in the west, nor the freedom of a Surrey common for the utter unnerving desolation of those moors. Had he regretted his flight? He wondered what the man's temperament was. He had been the bright and cheerful one—at least, according to Mrs. Everett. Was he anything more than bright and cheerful? He had cared sufficiently for something to stab a man in the back for it, but that did not argue sensitiveness. To a sensitive man, the horror of being alone and helpless and hunted in a country like this would probably be worse than a cell of familiar bricks and mortar. In the old days in the Highlands, to take to the hills had been synonymous with flying from justice—what the Irish call being on the run. But civilization had changed that completely. Not one criminal in a thousand now fled to the Highlands or to Wales for refuge. A man demanded the means of food and shelter in his retreat nowadays, and a deserted bothy or a cave on the hillside was out of date. If it had not been for Mrs. Everett's promise of sanctuary, not even her will would have got Lamont out of London Grant felt sure of that. What had Lamont felt when he saw what he had come to?

At Inverness he left the comfort of the through train and crossed the wind-swept platform into a little local affair that for the rest of the morning trundled from the green countryside back into a brown desolation such as had greeted Grant on waking. West and still farther west they trailed, stopping inexplicably at stations set down equally inexplicably in the middle of vast moors devoid of human habitation, until in the afternoon he was bundled out on to a sandy platform, and the train went away into the desolation without him. Here, he was told, he took the mail-car. It was thirty-six miles to Carninnish, and with any luck he'd be there by eight that night. It would all depend on how many things they met on the road. It wasn't but a fortnight back that Andy had had the right wheel in the front taken clean off of him by another motorcar, and him with the left wheel half into the ditch and all. Grant was led through a booking-office, and in the gravelled space behind the station beheld the contraption in which he was to spend the next five hours, and which would, with luck on the road, duly deposit him in Garnie. It was quite literally a charabanc. Behind the driving seat were three

benches, their penitential qualities inadequately mitigated by cushions, stuffed, apparently, with sawdust and covered in American cloth. There were, amazing as it seemed to him, five other candidates for seats on this conveyance. Grant made inquiries about hiring a car to do the journey, and the expressions on the faces of his audience conveyed to him not only the futility of his quest, but the fact that he had been guilty of a grave error of taste. One did not scorn the mail-car. It was the one significant thing in each day to the dwellers in the thirty-six miles between him and the sea. Grant resigned himself to discomfort, and hoped that comedy would save the journey from boredom. So far comedy had been absent from him. He bagged a seat by the driver and hoped for the best.

As they went along the narrow roads, torn here and there where burns had swept across them in their downward path in spate from the hills, he realized the force of the man's remark about meeting things. There was no room in most places for even a perambulator to pass.

"How do you manage when you meet something?" he asked the driver.

"Well, sometimes We back—and sometimes they back," he said. After about five miles Grant saw this new rule of the road demonstrated when they came face to face with a traction-engine. It was a diminutive specimen of its kind, but formidable enough in the circumstances. On one side was the hill, and on the other a small rocky ravine. With the greatest good humour the driver reversed, and backed his unwieldy vehicle until he could run it into the bank in a siding for road metal. The traction-engine chuffed complacently past, and the journey was resumed. In all the thirty-six miles they met only two more obstacles, both motors. In one case they grazed past by a mutual withdrawing of skirts, the near wheel of the mail-car being in a ditch and the near wheel of the other in a bank of heather and boulders. In the other case the car proved to be a Ford, and with the mongrel adaptability of its kind took without parley to the moor, and with complete insouciance swept bumping past the stationary mail-car what time the drivers exchanged unintelligible greetings. This display of amphibiousness seemed to astonish no one, and though the car was now full to overflowing, no remark was made. It was evidently a daily occurrence.

With the laden state of the car in his mind, Grant wondered what would happen to the people along the road who would have no means of travelling. The same fear had occurred to a little old woman who had been waiting by a roadside cottage for the car. As it slowed down and the driver descended to her assistance she looked scaredly at the crowded benches and said, "How are you going to make room, Andy?"

"Be quiet," said Andy cheerfully; "we never left any one yet."

"Be quiet," Grant learned, was not a reproof in this country, and had nothing to do with its English meaning. It was an expression of half-jocose refusal, and, on occasions, of straightforward admiration tinged with disbelief. On Andy's lips it meant that the old lady was what a Lowlander would call "haivering." And certainly he was as good as his word. Room was found, and no one seemed to suffer very badly, unless it was the hens in the coop at the back, which had been rolled slightly sideways. But they were still vociferously alive when their proud owner, waiting at the head of a track that led apparently nowhere, claimed them and bore them away in a wheelbarrow.

Several miles before Garnie, Grant smelt the sea—that seaweedy smell of the sea on an indented coast. It was strange to smell it so unpreparedly in such unsealike surroundings. It was still more strange to come on it suddenly as a small green pool among the hills. Only the brown surge of the weed along the rocks proclaimed the fact that it was ocean and not moor loch. But as they swept into Garnie with all the éclat of the most important thing in twenty-four hours, the long line of Garnie sands lay bare in the evening light, a violet sea creaming gently on their silver placidity. The car decanted him at the flagged doorway of his hostelry, but, hungry as he was, he lingered in the door to watch the light die beyond the flat purple outline of the islands to the west. The stillness was full of the clear, far-away sounds of evening. The air smelt of peat smoke and the sea. The first lights of the village shone daffodil-clear here and there. The sea grew lavender, and the sands became a pale shimmer in the dusk.

And he had come here to arrest a man who had committed murder in a London queue!

11—Carninnish

Grant had got little information from Andy, the mail-car driver, not because the driver was ignorant—after all, he had presumably driven Lamont these thirty-six miles over the hills only two days before—but because Andy's desire to find out all about himself was, surprisingly enough, just as strong as his to find out about Lamont, and he brushed aside Grant's most hopeful leads with a monosyllable or a movement of his head, and produced instead leads of his own. It was a game that soon palled, and Grant had given him up long before he had resigned himself to knowing no more of Grant. And now the landlord of the Garnie Hotel, interviewed in the porch after breakfast, proved equally unhelpful, this time through genuine ignorance. Where the mail-driver would have been intensely interested in whatever happened at Carninnish, which was his home and his resting-place each night, the landlord was interested only in Garnie, and in Garnie only as it affected his hotel.

"Come for some fishing, sir?" he said, and Grant said yes, that he had thoughts of fishing the Finley if that were possible.

"Yes," the man said, "that's just four mile at the back of the hill beyond. Perhaps you'll know the country?" Grant thought it best to disclaim any knowledge of the district. "Well, there's a wee village the other side, on Loch Finley, but you're better here. It's a wee poky place of an hotel they have there, and they have nothing but mutton to eat." Grant said they might do worse. "Yes, you'd think that the first day, and maybe the second, but by the end of a week the sight of a sheep on the hill'd be too much for you. We can send you over in the Ford every day if you're not fond of walking. You'll have a permit, I suppose?" Grant said that he had thought there would be some water belonging to the hotel. "No; all that water belongs to the gentleman who has Carninnish House. He is a Glasgow stockbroker. Yes, he's here—at least he came a week ago, if he's not gone again."

"Well, if I can have the Ford now, I'll go over and see him." Fishing was the only excuse which would allow him to wander the country without remark. "What did you say his name was?" he asked, as he stepped into a battered Ford alongside a hirsute Jehu with a glaring eye.

"He's a Mr. Drysdale," the landlord said. "He's not overgenerous with the water, but perhaps you'll manage it." With which cold comfort Grant set off on a still colder drive over the hills to the Finley valley.

"Where is the house?" he asked the hirsute one, whose name he learned was Roddy, as they went along.

"At Carninnish."

"Do you mean right in the village?" Grant had no intention of making so public an appearance at this early date.

"No; it's the other side of the river from the village."

"We don't go through the village?"

"No; the bridge is before you come to the village at all."

As they came to the edge of the divide the whole new valley opened maplike before Grant's fascinated gaze several hundreds of feet below. There were no fields, no green at all except on the border of the river that ran, a silver thread, through scattered birch to the distant sealoch. It was a brown country, and the intensity of the sea's blue gave it a foreign air—faery lands forlorn, with a vengeance, Grant thought. As they ran seawards down the side of the hill he noticed two churches, and took his opportunity.

"You have enough churches for the size of the village."

"Well," said Roddy, "you couldn't be expecting the Wee Frees to go to the U.F. That's the U.F. down there—Mr. Logan's." He pointed down to the right over the edge of the road, where a bald church and a solid four-square manse sheltered in some trees by the river. "The Wee Free is away at the other end of the village, by the sea."

Grant looked interestedly out of the corner of his eyes at the comfortable-looking house that sheltered his quarry. "Nice place," he said. "Do they take boarders?"

No, Roddy thought not. They let the house for a month in the summer. The minister was a bachelor, and his widowed sister, a Mrs. Dinmont, kept house for him. And his niece, Mrs. Dinmont's daughter, was home for holidays just now. She was a nurse in London.

No word of another inmate, and he could not pursue the subject without making the always curious Highlander suspicious. "Many people at the hotel here?"

"Three," said Roddy. As befitted the retainer of a rival concern there was nothing he did not know about the inn at Carninnish. But though all three were men, none of them was Lamont. Roddy had the history and predilections of all of them at his fingertips.

Carninnish House lay on the opposite side of the river from the village, close to the Sea, with the high road to the north at its back. "You'd better wait," Grant said, as Roddy pulled up before the door; and with what dignity Roddy's method of coming to a halt had left him, he descended on to the doorstep. In the hall was a lean, rather sour-looking man in good tweeds. The stockbroker's got a party, thought Grant. He had quite unconsciously pictured the stockbroking gentleman as round and pink and too tight about the trouser legs. It was therefore rather a shock when the lean man came forward and said, "Can I do anything for you?"

"I wanted to see Mr. Drysdale."

"Come in," said the man, and led him into a room littered with fishing tackle. Now Grant had intended quite shamelessly to try sobstuff on the broker of his imagination, appealing to his generosity not to spoil his holiday; but the sight of the real man made him change his mind. He took out his professional card, and was gratified at the man's surprise. It was a compliment to the perfection of the disguise which his old fishing clothes afforded.

"Well, Inspector, what can I do for you?"

"I want you to be good enough to let me fish in the Finley for a little. Two days at most, I think. I think a man I want is in the neighbourhood, and the only way I can go about without attracting notice is to fish. I thought the hotel at Garnie would have some fishing of their own, but it appears they haven't. I won't catch any fish, but I have fished a good deal, and I won't frighten everything in the river."

To his surprise a smile had come over the dour face of Mr. Drysdale. "Inspector," he said, "I don't think you can have any idea how unique this occasion is, how utterly unique you are. Even in the '45 they didn't come here looking for any one, and no one, certainly,

has done it since. It's simply incredible. A criminal in Carninnish, and a C.I.D. inspector looking for him! Why, drunk and incapable is the most horrible crime that this neighbourhood has known since the flood."

"Perhaps my man thought of that," said the inspector dryly. "Anyhow, I promise I shan't bother you long if you give me the permission to fish."

"Certainly you can fish. Anywhere you like. I'm going up the river now. Would you care to come with me, and I'll introduce you to the best pools? You might as well have a decent day's fishing if you're going to fish at all. Send that madman back to Garnie"—Roddy was giggling with a maid in high-pitched Gaelic outside the open window, quite indifferent to the probable proximity of "the gentleman"—"and tell him he needn't come back. I'll send you over in the evening whenever you want to go."

Delighted at the unexpected graciousness on the part of the ill-favoured and reputedly ungenerous one, Grant dismissed Roddy, who received his congé with the grave respect of an A.D. C., but departed in a flurry of high unintelligible cackle flung between himself and the maid. It sounded like the protesting row of an alarmed hen as she rockets over a fence to safety. When the noises had died away, Drysdale began in silence to collect his tackle for the river. He asked no more questions, and Grant was again grateful to him. To break the silence which Drysdale had evidently no intention of breaking, he asked about the state of the river, and soon they were talking fishing with the freedom of two enthusiasts. They proceeded up the right bank of the river—that is, the opposite bank from the village and the manse—and Drysdale pointed out the pools and their peculiarities. The whole tawny, narrow boulder-strewn river was not more than six miles long. It ran from a hill loch in an impetuous scramble, broken by still pools, to the sea at Carninnish.

"I expect you'd like to be near the village," Drysdale said, and suggested that the inspector should be left the lower half of the river while he went up to the hill end, where he would probably spend the day; and to that Grant gratefully agreed. As they passed opposite the manse, Grant said, "That the manse? Scotch clergymen seem to be very comfortable."

"They are," said Drysdale, with emphasis, but did not pursue the subject. Grant remarked on the apparent size of the house, and asked if they took boarders. It would be a good place to stay. Drysdale said that as far as he knew they did not take any one, and he repeated Roddy's tale of the summer letting. He took leave of Grant with the abruptness of a shy man, and departed into the landscape, leaving Grant with the comfortable knowledge that he had an ally after his own heart if the need for one should arise.

Grant decided that he would start fishing perhaps two hundred yards above the manse and work slowly down, taking his bearings and keeping an eye on the traffic to and from the house. On his side of the river there was a cart-track that was almost a road, but on the other side there was as far as he could see, only the path like a sheep-track made by the feet of fishermen and gillies, so that any one coming upriver would come on his side. The manse was surrounded by a stone wall, and faced away from him towards the high road on the other side of the river. Inside the wall was a row of scraggy firs which effectually hid the detail of the house. Only gleams of whitewash and its eight chimneys advertised its presence. At the back the garden wall ran down to the river bank, and in the middle of the wall flanking the river was a small iron gate of the strictly utilitarian pattern popular in the Highlands. Though he could not see the high road immediately in front of the house he had an uninterrupted view of the road on either side. No one could come or go from the house without his being aware of it. And he could stay where he was all day unquestioned and unremarkable. It was an ideal situation. Grant sent the first cast hissing over the brown shining water, and felt that life was good. It was too sunny for fishing and his prospects of catching anything were meagre in the extreme; but a bigger catch lay to his hand. No one had mentioned that a stranger had arrived at the manse, but just as he had known on the Brixton stair-landing that the rooms were empty, Grant now had a feeling that his man was here.

It was eleven before he began to fish, and for an hour or more no human activity other than his own broke the perfect peace of the morning. The two chimneys of the manse continued to smoke lazily into the bright air. The river babbled its eternal nursery-rhyme song at his feet, and the water slid under his eyes with a mesmeric swiftness. Away to his right beyond the distant bridge the whitewashed houses by the shore showed over the slight rise of the moor, placid and sunlit as a stage setting. Grant began to feel that the whole thing was a picture, like the illustration from which he had first learned French in his youth, and that he was merely stuck down there by the river so that the picture might be complete. He was not Grant of the C.I.D; he was pêcheur, to be pointed at with a wooden wand that tickled, for the education of some one unknown. A postman coming from the village, leaning heavily and alternately on the pedals of a push-bike, broke the spell. It was still a picture, but he no longer belonged to it. It was a stage setting—one of the tiny exhibition ones—and he was the giant who was going to upset the whole box of tricks. And, even as he thought it, the iron gate in the low wall of the manse swung open, and a girl came out, followed by a man. They shut the gate with difficulty and some laughter, and turned in single file down the footpath towards the bridge. Grant was still nearly a hundred yards above the house, and neither of them had noticed him. The man was dressed in flannel trousers, an old trench-coat, and a cap, and, except for his slightness, was as unlike the figure that had flung itself into the maelstrom of the Strand traffic as might well be. Grant was conscious of slight surprise. Revolving the matter during his long journey north, he had taken for granted that the man would look out of place. A London bookmaker's clerk would not be thrown into the western Highlands at a moment's notice and look like an habitué. Well, it might not be the man, after all. He hoped that they were making for the bridge and his side of the river, and not for the village. Surely, if they had set out for the village, they would have gone out by the front way and walked along the high road? He watched in suspense until he saw the girl turn to the bridge. But there was still a chance that they were going straight on by the high road past Carninnish House. Grant expelled a thankful breath as once more the girl turned riverwards and her companion joined her. They were coming up the river to him. They would pass only a few yards at his back. Industriously he flung a gleaming cast to the far side of the pool. He must not look their way again. In a minute or two they would have spotted him. He felt grateful to the ancient hat that collapsed more than drooped over his face, and to the shapeless garments that clothed him. His boots, too, were convincing even to the most suspicious eye. It had been no case of dressing the part this time; he was the genuine article, and he was glad of it. There would be no amateurish cast to attract the practised eye of Miss Dinmont—it must be Miss Dinmont. No suggestion of "towniness" about his clothes to call forth comment and her partner's instant interest. Suddenly above the swirl of the water he could hear their voices, raised because of the river's accompaniment. They were still laughing and animated, and apparently very good friends. Grant did not look round as they passed, nor did he look round immediately they had passed. If he glanced round now, a curious look from the man would have found his face revealed. But as they retreated upriver he watched them. Was it Lamont? He tried to picture the man's walk again. Short of

developing a limp, it is almost impossible to disguise a walk successfully. But he could not be sure. And then the man looked back suddenly. Grant was too far away to see his face, but the movement told him all he wanted to know. It was so vivid that, before his reason had time to note it, his mind was back at the bottom of Bedford Street. There was no doubt of it—the man was Lamont. Grant's heart sang. Had Lamont known him? He thought not. How could he? It was mere bad conscience that had made him turn. If he asked Miss Dinmont about him, he would hear that no one who was not staying at Carninnish House was allowed to fish the water, and he would be reassured.

And now what? Go to the house when he returned and arrest him straight away? He had the warrant in his pocket. But suddenly he wanted to be assured—assured beyond the possibility of doubt—that Lamont was the man who had murdered Sorrell. They knew that he was the man who had quarrelled with Sorrell before his death. But that was not proof. The link that connected him with the knife was still missing. Before he would risk executing the warrant he wanted to find out if Lamont's left hand bore the scar made by the knife. If it did not, then his case fell to pieces. However certain he himself might be, there must be no gaps in the evidence that would be put before a jury, and as long as there was a possible gap in the evidence, Grant had no intention of arresting any one. He must get himself invited to the manse. It should not be difficult. If all else failed, he could fall into the river and appeal to them to dry him.

He was eating the sandwiches provided by the Garnie Hotel, on a boulder half in and half out of the water, when the couple came back. They went swinging past him down to the bridge and into the village, and presently he saw them reappear and come back to the manse by the high road. It was lunchtime. They were safely occupied for an hour at least, and directly under his eye.

He was carefully wrapping up the remaining sandwiches against a lean time to come when the local policeman appeared from upriver pushing a punctured push-bicycle. He slowed down when he saw Grant—if his previous leisurely progress could admit of any retarding without bringing him to a stop—and as Grant looked up, the last semblance of progression ceased.

"Having any luck, sir?" asked the policeman. He had a face like a very pink waxwork, round and devoid of expression, and one glance at him made Grant thankful for the discovery of Drysdale. His pale blue eyes were fringed like a doll's, with fine black lashes, and an unconvincing moustache of silky black made a line on his upper lip. His fat, soft body could neither hurry nor take cover; that slow brain would be of no use whatever in an emergency.

Grant admitted that he had caught nothing, but added that he had hardly expected to on such a bright morning.

"Yes, that's so," said the man; "but it won't be long like that. There's never a day but there's some rain here. You'll catch a fish before night."

Grant recognized this as the Highlander's usual desire to say the thing he thinks will be acceptable to his hearer. "You haven't had the best of luck yourself," he said, indicating the tire.

"Indeed, I have not. These ro'ds are the very ruin on tires. Not but what I get an allowance for them, you know, but there's others isn't so lucky. Mr. Logan, the minister"—he jerked his head over at the manse—"was just saying to me the other day that ministers should have a tire-allowance as well as the pollis. He had three tires of his car punctured in one week. It would put even a minister in a temper."

"Are there many motors in Carninnish?"

"Well, Mr. Drysdale has two, as I expect you know, and Mr. Logan has one, but that's all. The other minister has a sidecar."

But when some one wanted to hire, what did they do?

Oh, as to that, the hotel had a Ford for visitors. They hired out that when they weren't needing it themselves. A Ford in the constable's opinion evidently did not come under the heading "cars."

Presently the constable said, "There's Mr. Logan away to see the new twins east at Arkless," and Grant saw a rather heavy figure appear on the high road on the Garnie side of the manse and proceed upriver at a businesslike pace.

"I thought that road led only over the hill to Garnie," Grant said.

"Oh yes, the high road. But where the high road begins to go up the hill there's a track goes off along the river to the crofts you can see from the ro'd. That's where he's going evernow, Mr. Logan. And that's why he's walking. He's not very fond of walking."

The constable stayed for a long time quite contentedly watching Grant fish, evidently glad to find interest for his eyes in a spot usually vacant, and Grant revolved the problem of what he would do if the Logan car appeared suddenly on the high road beyond the manse, bound for Garnie and the south. He would have no guarantee that Lamont was the passenger. It was too far away to identify any one. He would have to make certain of that before he did anything. And then it would be a choice between getting busy on a telephone or giving chase. The hotel Ford, he supposed. Or perhaps Drysdale would lend his car? But the afternoon wore on, the light took that white, hard, unsympathetic look that it does about four o'clock, the constable trundled his bicycle away to the village where he could procure the patching materials which he had evidently forgotten, and still no one came from the manse. At five o'clock Grant ate his remaining sandwiches, and began to consider what other possibilities there were of cadging an entrance to the manse. The thought of a dip in the river—even if it was only a momentary one—became less and less pleasant as the evening wore on. His thoughts were interrupted and his difficulties miraculously solved by heavy footsteps behind him. He looked round to see Mr. Logan at his back.

The minister gave him a hearty good evening, and his heavy red face with its hooked nose beamed benevolently. "It doesn't look as if you have had much luck," he said.

No, Grant said; he had been at it for a whole day, and had had nothing. They would laugh at him when he got back to Garnie.

"Oh, you're not staying at Carninnish House?"

No, Grant said; he was staying at the hotel at Garnie, but Mr. Drysdale had very kindly given him permission to fish the Finley for a day or two.

"Are the Garnie people sending for you?"

No, Grant said; he had intended to walk back when he was tired of fishing. It was only four miles or so, and any fish he caught would, of course, be left with Mr. Drysdale.

"It's very cold work, and disheartening when you've got nothing," said the minister. "Won't you come in and have a hot cup of tea at the manse? My name is Logan. Tea is between half-past five and six, and it should be ready now."

Grant thanked him, and tried not to show an indecent degree of joy at the invitation. Fate was playing into his hands. Once inside the manse and it would be for him to call the tune. It was difficult not to bundle his things together, grab the minister by the arm, and run him the half-mile down the river and back to the house. As it was, he packed up with extra deliberation, dawdled at the minister's pace, which had slackened considerably since the early afternoon, down the track, across the bridge, and along the high road to the front of the manse. As the minister led him down the broad path, cut in stretches of grass to the door, Grant's heart quickened perceptibly, and for once he did not smile at himself for a weakness. Ten days ago Barker had handed over this case to him, and he had been presented with a handkerchief, a revolver, and a bloodstained knife. Now, at the other end of the kingdom, he was about to come face to face with the man he wanted.

They divested themselves of their coats and hats in the hall, and Grant could hear through the closed door the chatter and clink of people at tea. Then Mr. Logan stepped over to the door and preceded him into the room.

12—Capture

It was a dining-room, and there were three people having tea at the table: an elderly woman with a faint resemblance to Mrs. Everett, a girl with reddish hair and a pale skin, and the Levantine. Grant had time to note them all from behind the minister's bulk before his host's making way for him brought him into their view, and he had the exquisite pleasure of seeing his quarry recognize him. For a second Lamont's eyes widened at him, then the blood rushed to his face and as suddenly receded, leaving it deathly pale. The looker-on in Grant thought how Danny Miller would have sneered at such an exhibition—Danny, who would kill a man and not bother to remember it. The Levantine was certainly an amateur at the game—a murderer by accident more than design, perhaps.

"I have brought you a visitor," the minister was saying. "This is Mr. Grant. I found him fishing, but catching nothing, so I brought him in to get some hot tea. My sister, Mrs. Dinmont. My niece, Miss Dinmont. And a friend of ours, Mr. Lowe. Now, where will you sit?"

Grant was given a seat beside Miss Dinmont and facing Lamont. Lamont had bowed to him when introduced, but so far gave no sign of ill-meditated action. Either he was paralysed or he was going to take things quietly. And then as he sat down Grant saw the thing that made his heart leap. Lamont's cup was on the wrong side of his plate. The man was left-handed.

"I am so glad you didn't wait, Agnes," Mr. Logan said in a tone which clearly said, I think you might have waited. "It was such a fine evening that I crossed by the swing bridge and came home by the other side of the river."

"Well, we're glad you did," said his niece, "because you've brought Mr. Grant, and that makes an uneven number, and so we can put it to the vote. We've been having a fight as to whether a mixture of race in a person is a good thing or not. I don't mean black and white, but just different stocks of white. Mother says that a single-stock person is the best, of course, but that is because she is solid Highland, back to the flood and before. Logans are Maclennans, you know, and there never was a Maclennan who hadn't a boat of his own. But my father was a Borderer and my grandmother English, and Mr. Lowe's grandmother was an Italian, so we are very firmly on the other side. Now, Uncle Robert is sure to side with Mother, being a pure-bred Highlander and having in a pure-bred degree all the stubbornness and stinking pride of his race. So we are looking to you for support. Do say that your ancestry is tartan."

Grant said, quite honestly, that he thought a mixed strain of more value than a pure-bred one. That was, talking of purebred as it can exist today. It gave a man a many-sidedness instead of giving him a few qualities in excess, and that was a good thing. It tended to cleverness and versatility, and consequently broad-mindedness and wide sympathies. On the whole, he endorsed Miss Dinmont's and Mr.—er—Lowe's point of view.

In view of the lightness of the conversation Grant was astonished at the vehemence and seriousness with which Mr. Logan contradicted him. His race was a fetish with him, and he compared it at length with most of the other nations in western Europe, to their extreme detriment. It was only towards the end of tea that Grant found, to his intense amusement, that Mr. Logan had never been out of Scotland in his life. The despised Lowlanders he had met only during his training for the ministry some thirty years ago, and the other nations he had never known at all. Frustrated in his effort—nobly seconded by Miss Dinmont—to make light conversation, Grant played the part of a Greek chorus to Mr. Logan, and let his thoughts deal with Lamont.

The Levantine was beginning to look a little better. He met Grant's eyes squarely, and except for the antagonism in his own, there was nothing remarkable about him. He made no attempt to hide the small scar on his thumb, though he must have known, as he knew about his telltale cup, that it was damning evidence. He had evidently decided that the game was up. It remained to be seen, though, whether he would come quietly when the time came. At least Grant was glad to see that flicker of antagonism in his eyes. It is an unlovely job to arrest a craven. A police officer would much sooner be hacked on the shins than clasped about the knees. There would quite obviously be no knee-clasping on this occasion.

One thing caused Grant's heart to harden against the man: the strides he seemed to have made in Miss Dinmont's regard in the three days of his stay. Even yet his quick smile came out to answer hers, and his eyes sought hers oftener than those of any one else at table. Miss Dinmont looked a girl who would be quite able to take care of herself—she had all a red-haired person's shrewdness and capability—but that did not excuse Lamont's lack of decent feeling. Had he merely been preparing an ally? A man on the run for murder does not usually have the spare interest for love-making—more especially if he is an amateur in crime. It was a blatant and heartless piece of opportunism. Well, he should have no chance of appealing to his ally; Grant would see to that. Meanwhile he kept his place in the conversation, and did justice to the fried trout which was the *pièce de résistance* of five-thirty tea at the manse. The Levantine ate, too, and Grant caught himself wondering what degree of effort was required to swallow each of these mouthfuls. Did he care, or had he got past that? Was his impudent "Don't you think so, Mr. Grant?" a bluff or the real thing? His hands were quite steady —that thin, dark left hand that had put an end to his friend's life—and he did not shirk his part in the conversation. There was obviously to the others no difference between the man who sat there now and the man who had sat there at lunch. The Levantine was doing it well.

At the end of tea, when they began to smoke, Grant offered Miss Dinmont a cigarette, and she raised her eyebrows in mock horror. "My dear man," she said, "this is a Highland manse. If you like to come out and sit on a stone by the river, I'll have one, but not

The "under this roof' was obviously a quotation, but her uncle pretended not to hear.

"There's nothing I'd like better," Grant said, "but it's getting late, and as I am walking to Garnie, I think I'd better start. I'm so grateful to you all for the good ending to my day. Perhaps Mr. Lowe would walk a bit of the way with me? It's early yet, and very fine."

"Certainly," said the Levantine, and preceded him into the hall. Grant's adieux to his hostess were cut short by the fear that Lamont would have disappeared, but he found him in the hall calmly hoisting himself into the trench-coat he had worn that morning. And then Miss Dinmont came out to join her uncle, who was seeing them off the premises, and Grant had a sudden fear that she was going to offer to accompany them. Perhaps the resolute way in which Lamont kept his back turned to her daunted her a little. It would have

been so natural for him to say, "Won't you come along too?"

But he said nothing. Kept his back turned, though he knew she was there. That could only mean that he didn't want her, and the suggestion she had been on the point of making died on her lips. Grant breathed again. He had no desire for a scene with a hysterical female, if it could be avoided. At the gate both men turned to acknowledge the presence of the two at the door. As Grant was replacing his battered hat he saw Lamont's salutation. It was a mere doffing his cap and donning it again, but Grant had not known that any gesture could be so eloquent of farewell.

They walked in silence up the first slight ascent of road until they were well out of sight of the house, at the parting of the ways where the high road went up the hill and the track to the crofts branched off along the river. There Grant halted and said, "I think you know what I want you for, Lamont?"

"What exactly do you mean?" asked Lamont, facing him calmly.

"I am Inspector Grant from Scotland Yard, and I have a warrant for your arrest for the murder of Albert Sorrell in the Woffington queue on the night of the 13th. I must warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you. I want to see that you have nothing on you. Will you take your hands out of your pockets a moment and let me run you over?"

"You've made a mistake, Inspector," the lean said. "I said I'd go a bit of the way with you, but I didn't say how far. This is where I get off." His left hand shot out of his pocket, and Grant, expecting a revolver, knocked his hand up as it lifted, but, even as his eyes closed instinctively, he saw and recognized the blue pepper-pot from the manse tea-table. Helpless, half blind, coughing and sneezing, he heard the man's flying feet on the moor-track, and desperately tried to control himself so that he could hear the direction of the retreating sounds. But it was at least two minutes before he could see well enough to be able to follow. A remembrance of that evening in the Strand came to him, and he decided to take his time. No man, even as lightly built as the Levantine was, could run for more than a limited time. There was a radius of possibility bounded by the circumstance of exhaustion point. And judging by the direction he had chosen, when he reached that exhaustion point, the Levantine would be in a country that offered him little means of escape. And, of course, he would be shrewd enough to recognize that. Therefore, the more likely procedure would be that he should repeat the tactics of the Strand evening: lie hidden, probably till darkness made it safe to move, and then return to a better means of escape.

Well, Grant thought, the man who has the higher ground commands the situation. A few yards farther on, a small trickle of water came down the hillside. The valley it made was not deep enough to afford him cover standing up, but, if he bent, it hid his progress up the hillside from any one farther along the moor-tract. With as keen a scrutiny round him as his still smarting eyes would permit, he took to the small gully and, bent double, scrambled up it, stopping every few yards to make sure that nothing was in sight and that he himself was still in adequate cover. Farther up, the gully was bordered by stunted birch, and still farther up it ran through a small plateau thinly wooded with larger birch. Birch in its first mist of green is not ideal cover, but the plateau afforded a first-rate outlook, so Grant decided to risk it. Circumspectly he raised himself from the sandy bank of the stream to the fine turf of the plateau, and crawled across it to the fringe of thick heather that bordered a drop of several feet in the face of the hillside. From this vantage he had the whole immediate sweep of the valley before him, with the exception of a slab to his right, which was hidden by one of the rectangular patches of firwood so typical of the country. The sight of the firwood reassured him. The firwood would be to Lamont what the door on the other side of Bedford Street had been. He had not the faintest doubt that Lamont was lying there now, waiting for him to declare himself on the road somewhere. What puzzled him was what Lamont thought was going to take the place of the busses and the taxis. What hope had he other than the darkness? And he must realize that, if he waited till dark, Grant would have given the alarm. Already the light was beginning to go. Should he abandon his hiding-place and give the alarm, or was that the very thing that Lamont wanted? Would he be playing into Lamont's hands now if he abandoned the watch and went back to raise beaters? He wished he could make up his mind—could see Lamont's play. The more he thought of it, the surer he felt that Lamont was counting on his going back to give the alarm. It was the obvious thing to do. He had given Lamont his chance of going quietly, and he had not taken it, even though his resistance had meant the publication of his true standing; most assuredly, then, he would expect the inspector to be squeamish no longer about his or other people's feelings, and to go back for help in his capture. That being so, Grant would stay where he was and keep an eye on the country.

For a long time he lay there in the dampish, withered heather, looking through the parted fronds at a tranquil strath. Once the brakes of a car squealed away to his left, where the high road came down the hill, and later he saw the car cross the bridge before the village, run like a small black spider along the road at the back of Carninnish House, and disappear up the coast road to the north. A sheep bleated far away on the hill, and a late lark sang high in the air, where the sun still was. But nothing moved in the valley but the river, and the slow northern twilight began to settle on it. And then something moved. Down by the river it was. Nothing more definite than the sudden flash of water in the river itself, there and gone again. But it was not the river; something had moved. Breathlessly he waited, his heart, pressed against the turf, beating time with the blood in his ears. He had to wait awhile, but what he saw he saw distinctly this time. From behind a huge twelve-foot boulder by the river his quarry slid into sight and disappeared again under the bank. Grant waited again patiently. Was he going to ground there, or was he making for somewhere? Even in his anxiety he was conscious of that amused indulgence with which a human being watches an unconscious wild animal busy about its own affairs—that "tickled" feeling that all human beings have when they are spying. And presently a gentle movement farther downstream advertised the fact that Lamont was not stationary. He was heading somewhere. And for a townsman he was making a wonderful job of cover. But then, of course, there had been the War—Grant had forgotten that Lamont was old enough to have seen active service. He probably knew all that was to be known about the art of taking cover. Grant had seen nothing that second time—he had merely been conscious of movement. He would probably have seen nothing the first time if there had been a better method of getting from that rock to the shelter of the bank than coming into the open. There was no further sign of movement, and Grant remembered that the left bank of the river would afford good shelter nearly all the way. It was time that he abandoned his seat on the dais and went down into the arena. What could Lamont's plan be? If he held to his present course, he would be back at the manse in a quarter of an hour. Was that where he was making for? Was he going to take advantage of the tenderness he had aroused so farseeingly in the Dinmont girl? A pretty enough plan. If he, Grant, had done as Lamont had suspected, and gone back for help, the last place any one would look for him would be in the manse itself.

Grant swore, and let himself down the gully again as quickly as the going and his desire to remain in cover would allow. He regained the moor-track and hesitated, wondering which was the better plan. Between him and the river stretched a piece of moor, boulder-strewn certainly, but without cover for anything bigger than a rabbit. Only the firwood farther on had enabled Lamont to reach the river unobserved by him. Well, what about going back now and giving the alarm? And catch the man being hidden by the minister's niece? asked the looker-on in him. Well, why not? he demanded angrily of himself: If she hides him, she deserves all that's coming to her. But there's no need for publicity even yet, urged his other half. Make sure it is to the manse he has gone, and then follow and arrest him there.

That seemed sensible enough, and Grant, hoping that no one as far down the river as Lamont was could see him, crossed the little moor to the river at the double. What he wanted was to cross the river. To follow the man down the river-bed was to court certain discovery. He did not want the man to run; he wanted him to go peacefully to ground in the manse, so that he could be pounced upon comfortably. If by any chance he could cross the river, he could keep an eye on the man's progress from the high ground on the other side, could even move parallel with him, if he could come up with him, without the man's being aware that he was being stalked. He looked at the torrent. Time was precious, and a wetting was nothing now. It is one thing to dip oneself in icy water in the cold blood of a high resolution and quite another to plunge into a flood in the heat of a chase. Grant chose a spot where the river was divided into three parts by two large boulders. If he could succeed in negotiating the first one, he could take the second and the bank in a flying leap, and it would not matter very much if he missed the bank as long as his hands caught at it. He would be across. He stepped back a pace or two and measured the distance to the first boulder with his eye. The first was the flatter of the two, and offered a landing-place; the second was pointed, and must be taken on the run. With an inarticulate prayer he launched himself into space, felt his nailed boots slip as they met the stone, recovered himself, felt the stone heeling over to the black pool beneath, leaped again, but knew even as he leaped that the slipping stone had lacked purchase for his spring, met the second stone sideways, and felt his hands on the far bank just in time to prevent himself going in farther than to his waist. Thankful and breathless, he pulled himself out, hastily wrung as much of the water from his heavy tweed trousers as would prevent him from being hampered by its weight, and made for the high ground beyond. Never had the moor appeared so treacherous. Dry tussocks of grass melted under his feet into bog, dead brambles clung with a living tenacity to his wet tweed, hidden branches of birch rose and hit him as he stepped on the nearer end, holes waited for his feet among the heather. It was more like a music-hall turn, he thought ferociously, than a serious attempt to overtake a criminal. Panting, he came to a turn of the river, and flung himself down to reconnoitre. There was his man, about fifty yards above the manse, moving very slowly and cautiously. It occurred to Grant that he, the pursuer, was having the rough time of it, while the pursued kept a pleasant and well-planned course in the open. Well, it wouldn't be for long. The minute the man turned into that little back gate that they were laughing so serenely over this morning, he, Grant, would be out of the heather and doubling down the cart-track by the river as hard as he could go. He had a small automatic in his pocket and a pair of handcuffs, and this time he would use them—both if necessary. His man wasn't armed or he wouldn't have stolen the pepper-pot from the tea-table, but he wasn't taking risks any longer. No one's feelings would be considered any more in this case—his own least of all. Let every female from here to Land's End have hysterics at once—he

Grant was still fuming and glowering and promising himself all sorts of fancy retributions when the man passed the gate. I have always wished that I could have seen Grant's face at that moment—seen the disgruntled anger and resentment of a man who had tried to do things decently, only to have had his decency taken advantage of, change to the sheer unbelieving astonishment of a small boy beholding his first firework. He blinked hard, but the picture remained the same; what he saw was real. The man had passed the gate. He was now at the end of the manse wall, and making for the bridge. What was the fool doing? Yes, Grant thought of him as a fool. He had worked out a perfectly good way of escape for him—to appeal to Miss Dinmont and lie doggo at the manse—and the fool wasn't taking advantage of it. He was near the bridge now. What was he doing? What was in his head? There was purpose in every movement. It was not an aimless or even a particularly furtive progress. He seemed to be too wrapped up in the thought of the business ahead to pay much attention to his present circumstances, beyond an occasional glance behind him up the river-bed. Not that there would be much good looking for cover so near the village. Even at this deserted hour, when every one was eating his evening meal and no one was abroad until, an hour later, they came to smoke pipes in the dusk at the bridge-end, there was always the chance of a passer-by, and any appearance of deliberate hiding would defeat its own ends. The man climbed on to the road beside the bridge, but went neither north to the right nor left towards the village. He crossed the road and disappeared on to the river-bank again. What could be get there? Was he going to work round to the hotel, which stood on the point where the river joined the sea, and try to steal the Ford? But he had obviously expected Grant to give the alarm. He would never venture up from the shore to the garage after waiting so deliberately to let Grant give warning. The shore?

Shore! Good heavens, he'd got it! The man had gone for a boat. They would be lying on the deserted shore, out of sight of the village. The tide was in—just on the ebb, in fact—and not a soul, child or adult, would be abroad to witness his departure. Grant hurled himself down the hillside, cursing in a reluctant admiration of the man's ingenuity. Grant knew the west coaster, and he had a shrewd idea how often these boats were used. If you stay in a west-coast village, you find that the scarcest commodity of all is fresh fish. It might be literally days before any one discovered that MacKenzie's boat was missing, and even then they would decide that some one had borrowed it, and would save up "the rough side of their tongues"—a course which involved no expenditure of energy—for the borrower when he should put it back. Had Lamont sat and thought all that out at the tea at the manse, Grant thought, as his feet touched the cart-track, or was it a Heaven-sent inspiration in the moment of need? If he had planned it, he thought, racing down the road to the bridge that seemed so strangely distant, then he had also planned that murder in the queue. When one came to think of it, even if one's grandmother was an Italian, one doesn't carry daggers about on the off-chance of their being useful. The man was a more accomplished villain than he had given him credit for, in spite of his lack of self-control on two occasions.

Long before Grant had reached the cart-track in his first avalanche down the hillside he had decided on his course of action. This morning, when he had emerged from Carninnish House with Drysdale, he had noticed a boathouse just beyond the house itself, and protruding from it, alongside the little jetty that led from its shelter to the sea, was what Grant in retrospect was sure was the stern of a motorboat. If he was right, and Drysdale was at home, and the light held, then Lamont was as good as caught. But there were three *ifs*

in the affair.

By the time he reached the bridge he was very nearly winded. He had come from the other side of the valley, and now down this one in his heavy fishing boots, with his wet tweeds weighing him down. Keen as he was, it required a real effort of will to make him double that last hundred yards up the north road to the gates of Carninnish House. Once there, the worst was over; the house lay only a few yards inside the gate, in the narrow strip between the road and the sea. When Drysdale's butler beheld a damp and breathless man at the door, he immediately jumped to conclusions.

"It is the master?" he said. "What's wrong? Is he drowned?"

"Isn't he here?" said Grant. "Damn! Is that a motorboat? Can I have a loan of it?" He waved a none too accurate hand towards the boathouse, and the butler looked suspiciously at him. None of the servants had been present at Grant's arrival in the morning.

"No, you cannot, my lad," said the butler, "and the sooner you get out of this, the better it will be for you. Mr. Drysdale will make you look pretty small when he comes, I can tell you."

"Is he coming soon? When is he coming?"

"He'll be here any minute."

"But any minute's too late!"

"Get out!" said the butler. "And have one less next time."

"Look here," said Grant, gripping him by the arm, "don't be a fool. I'm as sober as you are. Come down here where you can see the sea."

Something in his tone arrested the man's attention, but it was with obvious fear of personal violence that he approached the sea in company with the madman. Out in the middle of the loch was a rowing-boat, being rapidly propelled seawards down the narrow estuary on the ebbing tide.

"Do you see that?" Grant asked. "I want to overtake that boat, and I can't do it in a rowing-boat."

"No, you can't," said the man. "The tide goes out there like a mill stream."

"That's why I must have the motorboat. Who runs the motor? Mr. Drysdale?"

"No; I do usually when he goes out."

"Come on, then. You'll have to do it now. Mr. Drysdale knows all about me. I've been fishing the river all day. That man has a stolen boat, to begin with, and we want him very badly for other reasons, so get busy."

"Are you going to take all the responsibility of it if I go?"

"Oh, yes; you'll have the law on your side all right. I promise you that."

"Well, I'll just have to leave a message"—and he darted into the house.

Grant put out a hand to stop him, but was too late. For a second he was afraid that he was not, after all, convinced, and was merely making his escape; but in a moment he was back and they were running across the long, narrow lawn to the boathouse, where *Master Robert* floated. Drysdale had evidently christened the boat after the horse whose winning of the National had provided the money for her purchase. As the butler was fiddling with the engine, which uttered tentative spurts, Drysdale came round the end of the house with his gun, evidently just back from an afternoon on the hill, and Grant hailed him joyfully, and hurriedly explained what had happened. Drysdale said not a word, but came back to the boathouse with him and said, "It's all right, Pidgeon; I'll see to that, and take Mr. Grant out. Will you see that there is a good dinner waiting for two—no, three—when we get back?"

Pidgeon came out of the boat with an alacrity he took no trouble to hide. He gave *Master Robert* a push, Drysdale set the engine going, and with a roar they shot away from the jetty out into the loch. As they swerved round into their course down the loch, Grant's eyes fixed themselves on the dark speck against the pale yellow of the western sky. What would Lamont do this time? Come quietly? Presently the dark speck altered its course. It seemed to be making in to the land on the south side, and as it went away from the lighted skyline it became invisible against the background of the southern hills.

"Can you see him?" Grant asked anxiously. "I can't."

"Yes; he's making in to the south shore. Don't worry; we'll be there before he makes it."

As they tore along, the south shore came up to meet them in fashion seemingly miraculous. And in a moment or two Grant could make out the boat again. The man was rowing desperately for the shore. It was difficult for Grant, unacquainted with distances on water, to measure how far he was from the shore and how far they were from him, but a sudden slackening in *Master Robert's* speed told him all he wanted to know. Drysdale was slowing up already. In a minute they would have overhauled him. When the boats were about fifty yards apart, Lamont suddenly stopped rowing. Given it up, thought Grant. Then he saw that the man was bending down in the boat. Does he think we're going to shoot? thought Grant, puzzled. And then, when Drysdale had shut down the engine and they were approaching him with a smooth leisureliness, Lamont, coatless and hatless, sprang to his feet and then to the gunnel, as if to dive. His stockinged foot slipped on the wet gunnel, his feet went from under him. With a sickening crack that they heard quite distinctly, the back of his head hit the boat and he disappeared under water.

Grant had his coat and boots off by the time they were up to him.

"Can you swim?" asked Drysdale calmly. "If not, we'll wait till he comes up."

"Oh yes," Grant said, "I can swim well enough when there is a boat there to rescue me. I think I'll have to go for him if I want him. That was a terrific crack he got." And he went over the side. Six or seven seconds later a dark head broke the surface, and Grant hauled the unconscious man to the boat, and with Drysdale's help pulled him in.

"Got him!" he said, as he rolled the limp heap on the floor.

Drysdale secured the rowing-boat to the stern of *Master Robert* and set the engine going again. He watched with interest while Grant perfunctorily wrung his wet clothes and painstakingly examined his capture. The man was completely knocked out, and was bleeding from a cut on the back of the head.

"Sorry for your planking," Grant apologized as the blood collected in a little pool. "Don't worry," Drysdale said. "It will scrub. This the man you wanted?"

"Yes."

He considered the dark, unconscious face for a while.

"What do you want him for, if it isn't an indiscreet question?"

"Murder."

"Really?" said Drysdale, very much as though Grant had said "sheep-stealing." He considered the man again. "Is he a foreigner?" "No; a Londoner."

"Well, at the moment he looks very much as if he would cheat the gallows after all, doesn't he?"

Grant looked sharply at the man he was tending. Was he as bad as that? Surely not!

As Carninnish House swam up to them from across the water Grant said, "He was staying with the Logans at the manse. I can't very well take him back there. The hotel is the best place, I think. Then the Government can bear all the bother of the business."

But as they floated swiftly in to the landing-stage, and Pidgeon, who had been on the lookout for their return, came down to meet them, Drysdale said, "The man we went for is a bit knocked out. Which room was the fire lit in for Mr. Grant?"

"The one next yours, sir."

"Well, we'll carry this man there. Then tell Matheson to go over to Garnie for Dr. Anderson, and tell the Garnie Hotel people that Mr. Grant is staying the night with me, and bring over his things."

Grant protested at this unnecessary generosity. "Why, the man stuck his friend in the back!" he said.

"It isn't for him I'm doing it," Drysdale smiled, "though I wouldn't condemn my worst enemy to the hotel here. But you don't want to lose your man now that you've got him. Judging entirely by appearances, you had a very fine time getting him. And by the time they had lit a smoking fire in one of the glacial bedrooms over there"—he indicated the hotel on the point across the river—"and got him to bed, your man would be as good as dead. Whereas here there is the room you would have had to wash in, all warm and ready. It is far easier and better to dump the man there. And, Pidgeon!" as the man was turning away, "keep your mouth entirely closed. This gentleman met with an accident while boating. We observed it, and went out to his assistance."

"Very good, sir," said Pidgeon.

So Grant and Drysdale, between them, carried the limp heap upstairs, and rendered first aid in the big firelit bedroom; and then, between them, Pidgeon and Grant got him to bed, while Drysdale wrote a note to Mrs. Dinmont explaining that her guest had met with a slight accident and would stay here for the night. He was suffering from slight concussion, but would they not be alarmed.

Grant had just changed into some things of his host's, and was waiting at the bedside until dinner should be announced, when there was a knock at the door, and in answer to his "Come in," Miss Dinmont walked into the room. She was bareheaded and carried a small bundle under her arm, but appeared to be completely self-possessed.

"I've brought down some things of his," she said, and went over to the bed and dispassionately examined Lamont. For the sake of saying something, Grant said that they had sent for the doctor, but it was in his—Grant's—opinion a simple concussion. He had a cut on the back of the head.

"How did it happen?" she asked. But Grant had been facing this difficulty all the time he was changing out of his own wet things.

"We met Mr. Drysdale, and he offered to take us out. Mr. Lowe's foot slipped on the edge of the jetty, and the back of his head came in contact with it as he fell."

She nodded. She seemed to be puzzling over something and not to be able to make herself articulate. "Well, I'm going to stay and look after him tonight. It's awfully good of Mr. Drysdale to take him in." She untied her bundle matter-of-factly. "Do you know, I had a presentiment this morning when we were going up the river that something was going to happen. I'm so glad it's this and nothing worse. It might have been somebody's death, and that would have been incurable." There was a little pause, and, still busy, she said over her shoulder, "Are you staying the night with Mr. Drysdale too?"

Grant said "Yes," and on the word the door opened and Drysdale himself came in.

"Ready, Inspector? You must be hungry," he said, and then he saw Miss Dinmont. From that moment Grant always considered Drysdale a first-class "intelligence" man wasted. He didn't "bat an eyelid."

"Well, Miss Dinmont, were you anxious about your truant? There isn't any need, I think. It's just a slight concussion. Dr. Andersen will be along presently."

With another woman it might have passed muster, but Grant's heart sank as he met the Dinmont girl's intelligent eye. "Thank you for having him here," she said to Drysdale. "There isn't much to do till he comes round. But I'll stay the night, if you don't mind, and look after him." And then she turned to Grant and said deliberately, "Inspector of what?"

"Schools," said Grant on the spur of the moment, and then wished he hadn't. Drysdale, too, knew that it was a mistake, but loyally backed him up.

"He doesn't look it, does he? But then inspecting is the last resort of the unintellectual. Is there anything I can get you before we go and eat, Miss Dinmont?"

"No, thank you. May I ring for the maid if I want anything?"

"I hope you will. And for us if you want us. We're only in the room below." He went out and moved along the corridor, but, as Grant was following, she left the room with him and drew the door to behind her.

"Inspector," she said, "do you think I'm a fool? Don't you realize that for seven years I have worked in London hospitals? You can't treat me as a country innocent with any hope of success. Will you be good enough to tell me what the mystery is?"

Drysdale had disappeared downstairs. He was alone with her, and he felt that to tell her another untruth would be the supreme insult. "All right, Miss Dinmont, I'll tell you the truth. I didn't want you to know the truth before because I thought it might save you from—from feeling sorry about things. But now it can't be helped. I came from London to arrest the man you had staying with you. He knew what I had come for when I came in at teatime, because he knows me by sight. But when he came with me as far as the torof the road he bolted. In the end he took to a boat, and it was in diving from the boat when we followed that he cut his head open."

"And what do you want him for?"

It was inevitable. "He killed a man in London."

"Murder!" The word was a statement, not a question. She seemed to understand that, if it had been otherwise, the inspector would

have said manslaughter. "Then his name is not Lowe?"

"No; his name is Lamont—Gerald Lamont."

He was waiting for the inevitable feminine outburst of "I don't believe it! He wouldn't do such a thing!" but it did not come.

"Are you arresting him on suspicion, or did he do the thing?"

"I'm afraid there isn't any doubt about it," Grant said gently.

"But my aunt—is she—how did she come to send him here?"

"I expect Mrs. Everett was sorry for him. She'd known him some time."

"I only met my aunt once in the time I've been in London—we didn't like each other—but she didn't strike me as a person to be sorry for a wrongdoer. I'd be much more likely to believe she did the thing herself. Then he isn't even a journalist?"

"No," Grant said; "he's a bookmaker's clerk."

"Well, thank you for telling me the truth at last," she said. "I must get things ready for Dr. Anderson now."

"Are you still going to look after him?" Grant asked involuntarily. Was the outburst of disbelief coming now?

"Certainly," said this remarkable girl. "The fact that he is a murderer doesn't alter the fact that he has concussion, does it?—nor the fact that he abused our hospitality alter the fact that I'm a professional nurse? And even if it weren't for that, perhaps you know that in the old days in the Highlands a guest received hospitality and sanctuary even if he had his host's brother's blood on his sword. It isn't often I boost the High-lands," she added, "but this is rather a special occasion." She gave a little catch of her breath that might have been a laugh or a sob, and was probably half one, half the other, and went back into the room to look after the man who had so unscrupulously used herself and her home.

13—Marking Time

Grant did not sleep well that night. There was every reason why he should have slept in all the sublime peace of the righteous man of good digestion. He had finished the work he had come to do, and his case was complete. He had had a hard day in the open, in air that was at once a stimulant and a narcotic. The dinner provided by Drysdale had been all that either a hungry man or an epicure could have wished for. The sea outside his window breathed in long, gentle sighs that were the apotheosis of content. The turf fire glowed soothingly as no flickering bonfire of wood or coals ever does. But Grant slept badly. Moreover, there was discomfort in his mind some-where, and like all self-analytical people, he was conscious of it and wanted to locate it, so that he could drag it out to the light and say, "Goodness, is that all!" and find relief and comfort as he had so often done before. He knew quite well how that uneasiness which ruined the comfort of his twelve mattresses of happiness proved on investigation to be merely the pea of the fairy-tale. But, rout round as he would, he could find no reason for his lack of content. He produced several reasons, examined them, and threw them away. Was it the girl? Was he being sorry for her because of her pluck and decency? But he had no real reason to think that she cared for the man other than as a friend. Her undeniable interest in him at tea might have been due merely to his being the only interesting man from her point of view in a barren countryside. Was he overtired, then? It was a long time since he had had a whole day's fishing followed by a burst across country at a killing pace. Or was it fear that his man would even yet slip through his fingers? But Dr. Anderson had said that there was no fracture and the man would be able to travel in a day or two. And his chances of escape now weren't worth considering, even as hypothesis.

There was nothing in all the world, apparently, to worry him, and yet he had that vague uneasiness in his mind. During one of his periodical tossings and turnings he heard the nurse go along the corridor, and decided that he would get up and see if he could be of any use. He put on his dressing-gown and made for the wedge of light that came from the door she had left ajar. As he went, she came behind him with a candle.

"He's quite safe, Inspector," she said, and the mockery in her tone stung him as being unfair.

"I wasn't asleep, and I heard you moving and thought I might be of some use," he said, with as much dignity as one can achieve in the *déshabillé* of the small hours.

She relented a little. "No, thank you," she said; "there's nothing to do. He's still un-conscious." She pushed open the door and led him in.

There was a lamp at the bedside, but otherwise the room was dark and filled with the sound of the sea—the gentle *hushzsh* which is so different from the roar of breakers on an open coast. The man, as she said, was still unconscious, and Grant examined him critically in the light of the lamp. He looked better, and his breathing was better. "He'll be conscious before morning," she said, and it sounded more like a promise than a statement.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am," Grant said suddenly, "that you should have had all this—that you should have been brought into this."

"Don't worry, Inspector; I'm not at all fragile. But I'd like to keep my mother and uncle from knowing about it. Can you manage that?"

"Oh, I think so. We can get Dr. Anderson to prescribe south treatment for him."

She moved abruptly, and he was conscious of the unhappiness of his phrase, but could see no way of remedying it, and was silent. "Is he a bad lot?" she asked suddenly. "I mean, apart from—"

"No," said Grant, "not as far as we know." And then, afraid that the green growth he had burned out last night might begin to shoot again, and more pain be in store for her, he added, "But he stuck his friend in the back."

"The man in the queue?" she said, and Grant nodded. Even yet he was waiting momentarily for the "I don't believe it." But it did not come. He had at last met a woman whose common sense was greater than her emotions. She had known the man only three days, he had lied to her every hour of these days, and the police wanted him for murder. That was sufficient evidence in her clear eyes to prevent her taking any brief in his favour.

"I have just put the kettle on the gas-ring in the bathroom for tea," she said. "Will you have some?" and Grant accepted and they drank the scalding liquid by the open window, the sea heaving below them in the strangely balmy west-coast night. And Grant went to bed again quite sure that it was not Miss Dinmont's emotions that worried him, but still uneasy about something, And now, writing triumphant telegrams to Barker in the golden morning, with the comfortable smell of bacon and eggs con-tending amiably with the fragrance of sea-weed, he was still not as happy as he should have been. Miss Dinmont had come in, still in the white overall that made her look half surgeon, half religieuse, to say that her patient was conscious, but would Grant not come to him until Dr. Anderson had been?—she was afraid of the excitement; and Grant had thought that eminently reasonable.

"Has he just come round?" he asked,

No, she said; he had been conscious for some hours, and she went serenely away, leaving Grant wondering what had passed between patient and nurse in those few hours. Drysdale joined him at breakfast, with his queer mixture of tacitumity and amiability, and arranged that he should have a real day's fishing as an offset to the distracted flogging of the water which had occupied him Yesterday. Grant said that, once Anderson had been and he had heard a report of his man, he would go. He sup-posed any telegrams could be sent down to him.

"Oh, yes; there's nothing Pidgeon likes like being important. He's in his element at the moment."

Dr. Anderson, a little man in ancient and none too clean tweeds, said that the patient was very well indeed—even his memory was unimpaired—but he would advise Grant, whom he took to be the man's nearest friend, not to see him until this evening. It would be best to give him a day to be quiet in. And since Miss Dinmont seemed determined to look after him, they need have no fear about him. She was an excellent nurse.

"When can he travel?" asked Grant. "We're in a hurry to get south."

"If it is very important, the day after to-morrow, perhaps." And seeing Grant look disappointed, "Or even tomorrow, if the journey were made comfortable. It all depends on the comfort of the travel. But I wouldn't recommend it till the day after to-morrow at the earliest."

"What's the hurry?" Drysdale said. "Why spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar?"

"Afraid of loose moorings," Grant said.

"Don't worry. The excellent Pidgeon will dote on being head warder."

Then Grant turned to the surprised doctor and explained the truth of the situation. "There's no chance of his getting away if we let him stay here till he is stronger?"

"He's safe enough today," Anderson said. "The man isn't fit to lift a little finger at the moment. He'd have to be carried if he escaped, and I don't suppose there's any one here who would be willing to carry him."

So Grant, conscious of being entirely unreasonable and at sea with himself, agreed, wrote a second report to Barker to supplement the one he had written on the previous night, and departed to the river with Drysdale.

After a day of wide content, broken only by the arrival of Pidgeon's subordinate, a youth with a turned-up nose and ears that stuck out like handles, with telegrams from Barker, they came back to the house between tea and dinner; and Grant, after a wash, knocked at the door that sheltered Lamont. Miss Dinmont admitted him, and he met the black eyes of the man on the bed with a distinct feeling of relief; he was still there.

Lamont was the first to speak. "Well, you've got me," he said, drawling a little.

"Looks like it," said Grant. "But you had a good run for your money."

"Yes," agreed the man, his eyes going to Miss Dinmont and coming back at once. "Tell me, what made you dive off the boat? What was the idea?"

"Because swimming and diving is the thing I'm best at. If I hadn't slipped, I could have got to the rocks under water and lain there with only my nose and my mouth out until you got tired looking for me, or the dark came. But you won—by a head." The pun seemed to please him.

There was a little silence, and Miss Dinmont said in her clear, deliberate voice, "I think, Inspector, he's well enough to be left now. At least, he won't need professional services any longer. Perhaps some one in the house would look after him to-night?"

Grant deduced that this was her way of saying that the man was strong enough now to have a more adequate guard, and thank-fully agreed. "Do you want to go now?"

"Just as soon as some one can take my place without any one being upset."

Grant rang, and explained the situation to the maid that came. "I'll stay if you would like to go now," he said when the maid had gone, and she agreed.

Grant went to the window and stood looking out at the loch, so that, if she wanted to say anything to Lamont, the way was clear, and she began to collect her things. There was no sound of conversation, and, looking round, he saw that she was apparently quite absorbed in the task of leaving nothing behind her, and the man was watching her unblinkingly, his whole being waiting for the moment of her leave-taking. Grant turned back to the sea, and presently he heard her say, "Shall I see you again before you go?" There was no answer to that, and Grant turned round to find that she was addressing himself.

"Oh, yes, I hope so," he said. "I'll call at the manse if I don't see you otherwise—if I may."

"All right," she said, "then I needn't say goodbye just now." And she went out of the room with her bundle.

Grant glanced at his captive and looked away at once. It is indecent to pry too far into even a murderer's soul. When he looked back again, the man's eyes were closed and his face was a mask of such un-speakable misery that Grant was unexpectedly moved. He had cared for her, then—it had not been merely opportunism.

"Can I do anything for you, Lamont?" he asked presently.

The black eyes opened and considered him unseeingly. "I suppose it is too much to expect any one to believe that I didn't do it," he said at length.

"It is, rather," said Grant dryly.

"But I didn't, you know."

"No? Well, we hardly expected you to say you did."

"That's what she said."

"Who?" asked Grant, surprised.

"Miss Dinmont. When I told her I hadn't done it."

"Oh? Well, it's a simple process of elimination, you see. And everything fits in too well for the possibility of a mistake. Even down to this." And picking up Lamont's hand from where it lay on the counterpane, he indicated the scar on the inside of his thumb. "Where did you get that?"

"I got it carrying my trunk up the stairs to my new rooms in Brixton—that morning."

"Well, well," said Grant indulgently, "we won't argue the affair now, and you're not well enough to make a statement. If I took one now, they'd hold it up to me that I had got it from you when you weren't *compos mentis*."

"My statement'll be the same whenever you take it," the man said; "only, no one will believe it. If they would have believed it, I wouldn't have run."

Grant had heard that tale before. It was a favourite gambit with criminals who had no case. When a man plays injured innocence, the layman immediately considers the possibility of a mistake; but the police officer, who has a long acquaintance with the doubtedly guilty, is less impressionable—in fact, is not impressed at all. A police officer who was impressed with a hard-luck story, however well told, would be little use in a force designed for the suppression of that most plausible of creatures, the criminal. So Grant merely smiled and went back to the window. The loch was like glass this evening, the hills on either side reflected to their last detail in the still water. *Master Robert* rode below the boathouse—"a painted ship"—only that no paint could reproduce the translucence of the sea as it was now.

Presently Lamont said, "How did you find where I had come to?"

"Fingerprints," said Grant succinctly.

"Have you got fingerprints of mine?"

"No, not yours. I'm going to take them in a minute."

"Whose, then?"

"Mrs. Everett's."

"What has Mrs. Everett got to do with it?" the man said, with the first hint of defiance.

"I expect you know more about that than I do. Don't talk. I want you to be able to travel tomorrow or the next day."

"But look here, you haven't done any-thing to Mrs. Everett, have you?"

Grant grinned. "No; I think it's what Mrs. Everett's done to us."

"What do you mean? You haven't arrested her, have you?"

There was obviously no hope of the man being quiet until he knew how they had traced him, so Grant told him. "We found a fingerprint of Mrs. Everett's in your rooms, and as Mrs. Everett had told us she didn't know where your new rooms were, it was a fair conclusion that she had a finger in the pie. We found that her relations stayed here, and then we found the man you fooled at King's Cross, and his description of Mrs. Everett made things sure. We only just missed you at the Brixton place."

"Mrs. Everett won't get into trouble over it, will she?"

"Probably not—now that we've got you."

"I was a fool to run, in the first place. If I'd come and told the truth in the beginning, it couldn't be any worse than it is now, and I'd have saved all the hell between." He was lying with his eyes on the sea. "Funny to think that, if some one hadn't killed Bert, I'd never have seen this place or—or anything."

The "anything" the inspector took to be the manse. "M'm! And who do you think killed him?"

"I don't know. There wasn't any one I know of who'd do that to Bert. I think perhaps some one did it by mistake."

"Not looking what they were doing with the needle, as it were?"

"No, in mistake for some one else."

"And you're the left-handed man with a scar on his thumb who quarrelled with Sorrell just before his death, and who has all the money Sorrell had in the world, but you're quite innocent."

The man turned his head wearily away. "I know," he said. "You don't need to tell me how bad it is."

A knock came to the door, and the boy with the protruding ears appeared in the doorway and said that he had been sent to relieve Mr. Grant, if that was what Mr. Grant wanted. Grant said, "I'll want you in five minutes or so. Come back when I ring." And the boy melted, grin last, into the dark of the passage like a Cheshire cat. Grant took something out of his pocket and fiddled with it at the washstand. Then he came over to the bedside and said, "Fingerprints, please. It's quite a painless process, so you needn't mind." He took prints of both hands on the prepared sheets of paper, and the man submitted with an indifference tinged with the interest one shows in experiencing something, however mild, for the first time. Grant knew even as he pressed the fingertips on the paper that the man had no Scotland Yard record. The prints would be of value only in relation to the other prints in the case.

As he laid them aside to dry, Lamont said, "Are you the star turn at Scotland Yard?"

"Not yet," said grant. "You flatter yourself."

"Oh, I only thought—seeing your photograph in the paper."

"That was why you ran last Saturday night in the Strand."

"Was it only last Saturday? I wish the traffic had done for me then!"

"Well, it very nearly did for me."

"Yes; I got an awful jolt when I saw you behind me so soon."

"If it's any comfort to you, I got a much worse one when I saw you arriving back in the Strand. What did you do then?"

"Took a taxi. There was one passing."

"Tell me," the inspector said, his curiosity getting the better of him, "were you planning the boat escape all the time at the manse tea?"

"No; I had no plans at all. I thought of the boat afterwards only because I'm used to boats, and I thought you'd think of them last. I was going to try to escape somehow, but I didn't think of it until I saw the pepper-pot as I was going out. It was the only way I could think of, you see. Bert had my gun."

"Your gun? Was that your gun in his pocket?"

"Yes; that's what I went to the queue for."

But Grant did not want statements of that sort tonight. "Don't talk!" he said, and rang for the boy. "I'll take any statement you want to give me tomorrow. If there's any-thing I can do for you tonight, tell the boy and he'll let me know."

"There isn't anything, thank you. You've been awfully decent—far more decent than I thought the police ever were—to criminals."

That was so obviously an English version of Raoul's *gentil* that Grant smiled involuntarily, and the shadow of a smile was reflected on Lamont's swarthy face. "I say," he said, "I've thought a lot about Bert, and it's my belief that, if it wasn't a mistake, it was a woman."

"Thanks for the tip," said Grant dryly, and left him to the tender mercies of the grinning youth. But as he made his way downstairs he was wondering why he had thought of Mrs. Ratcliffe.

14—The Statement

It was not at Carninnish, however, that Lamont gave his statement to the inspector, but on the journey south. Dr. Anderson, on hearing what was mooted, pleaded for one more day's rest for his patient. "You don't want the man to have inflammation of the brain, do you?"

Grant, who was dying to have a statement down in black and white, explained that the man himself was anxious to give one, and that giving it would surely harm him less than having it simmering in his brain.

"It would be all right at the beginning," Anderson said, "but by the time he had finished he would need another day in bed. Take my advice and leave it for the mean-time." So Grant had given way and let his captive have still longer time to burnish the tale he was no doubt concocting. No amount of burnish, he thought thankfully, would rub out the evidence. That was there unalterable, and nothing the man might say could upset the facts. It was as much curiosity on his part, he told himself, as fear for his case that made him so eager to hear what Lamont had to say. So he bullied himself into some show of patience. He went sea-fishing in Master Robert with Drysdale, and every chug of the motor reminded him of the fish he had landed two nights ago. He went to tea at the manse, and with Miss Dinmont's imperturbable face opposite him and an odd pepper-pot alongside the salt on the table, his thoughts were almost wholly of Lamont. He went to church afterwards, partly to please his host, but mainly to avoid what was evidently going to be a tête-àtête with Miss Dinmont if he stayed behind, and sat through a sermon in which Mr. Logan proved to his own and his congregation's satisfaction that the King of kings had no use for the fox-trot; and thought continually of the statement Lamont would give him. When the incredibly dreary noise of High-land "praise" had faded into silence for the last time and Mr. Logan had pronounced an unctuous benediction, his one thought was that now he could go back and be near Lamont. It was rapidly becoming an obsession with him, and he recognized the fact and resented it. When Mrs. Dinmont—Miss Dinmont had not come to church—reminded him as she was saving good-night that on the morrow the car would stop at the manse gate to allow them to say goodbye to Mr. Lowe, it came as a shock to him that there was more play-acting to be done before he departed from Carninnish. But things proved easier than he had anticipated. Lamont played up as he had played up during the fateful tea, and neither his host nor his hostess suspected that there was anything more serious amiss than the matter of his health. Miss Dinmont was not present. "Dandy said she had already said goodbye to you, and it is unlucky to say goodbye twice," her mother said. "She said you had been unlucky enough already. Are you a very unlucky person, then?"

"Very," said Lamont, with an admirable smile and as the car moved away, Grant took out the handcuffs.

"Sorry," he said brusquely. "It's only till we reach the railway." But Lamont merely repeated the word "Unlucky!" as if, surprisingly, he liked the sound of it. At the station they were joined by a plainclothes man, and at Inverness had a compartment to themselves. And it was after dinner that night, when the last light was going on the hills, that Lamont, pale and rather ill-looking, offered again to tell them all he knew.

"It isn't much," he said. "But I want you to know."

"You realize that what you say may he used against you?" Grant said. "Your lawyer would probably want you to say nothing. You see, it's putting your line of defence into our hands." And even while he was saying it, he was wondering: Why am I so punctilious? I've told him already that anything he says may be used against him. But Lamont wanted to talk, and so the constable produced his notebook.

"Where shall I begin?" Lamont asked. "It's difficult to know where to start."

"Suppose you tell us how you spent the day Sorrell was murdered that's a week last Tuesday—the 13th."

"Well, in the morning we packed—Bert was leaving for America that night and I took my things to my new room in Brixton and he took his to Waterloo."

Here the inspector's heart missed a beat. Fool! He'd forgotten all about the man's luggage. He had been so hot on the false scent of the Ratcliffes and then on the trail of Lamont that he hadn't had time to see the thing under his nose. Not that it was of supreme importance, in any case.

"That took us till lunchtime. We had lunch in the Coventry Street Lyons—"

"Whereabouts?"

"In a corner table on the first floor."

"Yes; go on."

"All the time we were having lunch we argued as to whether I was going to see him off or not. I wanted to go down to Southampton with him and see him sail, but he wouldn't let me come even to the boat-train at Waterloo. He said there wasn't any-thing in the world he hated like being seen off, especially when he was going a long way. I remember he said, 'If a chap's not going far, then there's no need, and if he's going to the other side of the world, then there's no good. What's a few minutes more or less?' Then in the afternoon we went to the Woffington to see *Didn't You Know?*"

"What!" said Grant. "You went to the show at the Woffington in the afternoon?"

"Yes; that was arranged a long time be-forehand. Bert had booked seats. Stalls. It was a sort of final do—celebration. At the interval he told me that he was going to join the pit queue for the evening performance as soon as we got out—he had gone a lot to *Didn't You Know?* It was a sort of craze; in fact, we both went a lot—and said that we'd say goodbye then. It seemed a poor way to me to say goodbye to a pal you'd known as well as I knew Bert, but he was always a bit unaccountable, and anyhow, if he didn't want me, I wasn't going to insist on being with him. So we said goodbye outside the front of the Woffington, and I went back to Brixton to unpack my things. I was feeling awfully fed up, because Bert and I had been such pals that I hadn't any others worth mentioning, and it was lonely at Brixton after Mrs. Everett's."

"Didn't you think of going with Sorrell?"

"I wanted to, all right, but I hadn't the money. I hoped for a while that he'd offer to lend me it. He knew that I'd pay him back all

right. But he never did. I was a bit sore about that too. Every way I was pretty fed up. And Bert himself didn't appear to be happy about it. He hung on to my hand like anything when we were saying goodbye. And he gave me a little packet and said I was to promise not to open it till the day after to-morrow—that was the day after he sailed. I thought it was a sort of farewell present, and didn't think anything more about it. It was a little white packet done up in paper like jewellers use, and as a matter of fact I thought it was a watch. My watch was always going crazy. He used to say, 'If you don't get a new watch, Jerry, you won't be in time for kingdom come even.'"

Lamont choked suddenly and stopped. He carefully wiped away the steam on the window and then resumed:

"Well, when I was unpacking my things in Brixton, I missed my revolver. I never used the thing, of course. It was just a war souvenir. I had a commission, though you mightn't think it. And I tell you straight I'd rather a thousand times be for it wire-cutting, or anything else like that, than be hunted round London by the police. It isn't so bad in the open. More like a game, somehow. But in London it's like being in a trap. Didn't *you* feel that it wasn't so deadly awful out in the country somehow?"

"Yes," admitted the inspector; "I did. But I didn't expect you to. I thought you'd be happier in town."

"Happy! God!" said Lamont, and was silent, evidently living it over again.

"Well," prompted the inspector, "you missed your revolver?"

"Yes; I missed it. And though I didn't use it—it used to be kept locked in a drawer at Mrs. Everett's—I knew exactly where I had put it when I was packing. Whereabouts in the trunk, I mean. And as it was only that morning I had packed, I was just taking things out in the reverse order from the way I'd put them in, and so I missed it at once. And then I grew frightened somehow—though even yet I can't tell you why. I began to remember how quiet Bert had been lately. He was always quiet, but lately he had been more so. Then I thought he might just have wanted a gun going to a strange country. But then I thought he might have asked for it. He knew I'd have given it to him if he asked for it. Anyway, I was sort of frightened, though I couldn't tell you just why, and I went straight back to the queue and found him. He had a good place, about a third of the way down, so I think he had had a boy to keep his place for him. He must have meant all the time to go back on his last night. He was sentimental, Bert. I asked him if he had taken my revolver, and he admitted it. I don't know why I grew so scared then all of a sudden. Looking back, it doesn't seem to be anything to be scared about your pal having taken your revolver. But I was, and I lost my head and said, 'Well, I want it back right now.' And he said, 'Why?' And I said, 'Because it's my property and I want it.' He said, 'You're a mean skunk, Jerry. Can't I borrow anything of yours even when I'm going half round the world and you're going to stay in little safe old London?' But I stuck to having it back. Then he said, 'Well, you'll have a sweet time unpacking my things for it, but I'll give you the key and the ticket.' It was only then that it occurred to me that I had taken it for granted that he had the revolver on him. I began to feel small and to feel I'd made a fool of myself. I always did things first and thought afterwards, and Bert always thought for ages about a thing, and then would do exactly as he had intended to. We were opposites in lots of ways. So I told him to keep his ticket and the revolver too, and went away."

Now there had been no cloakroom ticket found in Sorrell's possession.

"Did you see the ticket?"

"No; he only offered to give it to me.

"Next morning I was late because I wasn't used to doing for myself, and I had to make my own breakfast and tidy up, but I didn't hurry because I had no job. I was hoping to get a clerk's place when the 'flat' started. It was nearly twelve when I went out, and I wasn't thinking of anything but Bert. I was so fed up with the way we'd parted and the fool I'd made of myself that I went to a post office and sent a wire to Bert addressed to the *Queen of Arabia*, saying, 'Sorry.—JERRY.'"

"What post office did you send the telegram from?"

"The one on Brixton High Street."

"All right; go on."

"I bought a paper and went back to my rooms, and then I saw about the queue murder. It didn't give any description of the man except that he was young and fair, and I didn't connect him with Bert. When I thought of Bert, I always thought of him aboard ship by this time d'you see? If the man had been shot, I'd have been alarmed at once. But stuck with a knife was different."

At this stage Grant looked with increduous astonishment at Lamont. Was the man by any remotest possibility telling the truth? If not, he was the most cold-blooded wretch Grant had ever had the unhappy lot to meet. But the man appeared unconscious of Grant's scrutiny; he seemed wholly absorbed in his story. If this was acting, it was the best Grant had ever seen; and he deemed himself a connoisseur.

"On Thursday morning when I was clearing up, I remembered Bert's parcel, and opened it. And inside was all Bert's cash. I was flabbergasted, and somehow I was scared again. If anything had happened to Bert, I'd have heard about it—I mean, I thought I would have—but I didn't like it. There was no note with it. He had said when he handed it over, 'This is for you,' and made me promise not to open it till the time he said. I didn't know what to do about it because I still thought of Bert as being on the way to New York. I went out and got a paper. They had all big headlines about the queue murder, and this time there was a full description of the man and his clothes and the contents of his pockets. That was in black type, and I knew at once it was Bert. got on a bus, feeling sick all over, but meaning to go to Scotland Yard right away and tell them all I knew about it. On the bus I read the rest of the thing. It said that the murder had been done by some one left-handed, and wanted to know who had left the queue. Then I remembered that we had had an argument that any one might have overheard, and that I had all Bert's money without a single thing to show how I got it. I got off the bus in an awful sweat, and walked about thinking what was to be done. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed that I couldn't go to Scotland Yard with a tale like that. I was torn between that and letting Bert lie there while the — skunk that killed him went free. I was about crazy that day. I thought that, if I didn't go, perhaps they'd get on to the track of the right man. And then I'd wonder if I was using that as an excuse for not going—funking, you know. My thoughts went round and round like that, and I couldn't come to any decision. On Friday they said the inquest was to be that day, and that no one had claimed to know Bert. There was one time during that day that I very nearly went to the police station, and then, just when the thought of Bert had got my courage up, I remembered what a thin yarn I had about myself. So instead I sent some of Bert's money to bury him. I'd have liked to say who he was, but I knew that would bring them all about me in a minute. And then next morning I saw they had my description. They were looking for me. I'd have gone then of my own accord. Only, in the description it said that the man had a scar on the inside of his finger or thumb. That tore

it. I got that scar"—he extended his hand—"as I told you—carrying my trunk up the stairs to my room. The buckle caught me as I was letting it down. But that tore it all right. Who would believe me now? I waited till it was late afternoon, and then I went to Mrs. Everett. She was the only real friend I had, and she knew me. I told her every last thing about it. She believed me because she knew me, you see, but even she saw that no one who didn't know me would believe me. She called me a fool, or as good as, for not going straight away to tell what I knew. She would have. She ruled us both. Bert used to call her Lady Macbeth, because she was Scotch and used to screw us up to doing things when we were wavering about them. She said all I could do now Was to lie low. If they didn't find me, there was always the chance of their getting on to the right man, and afterwards she would give me the money to go abroad. I couldn't use Bert's, somehow. When I left her I went all the way into town because I couldn't bear the thought of going back to my rooms with nothing to do but listen for feet on the stairs. I thought I would be safest in a movie show, and I meant to go up to the Haymarket. And then I looked back in the Strand and saw you behind me. You know that bit. I went back to my rooms at once, and didn't stir out of them till Mrs. Everett came on Monday and told me you'd been to her. She came to King's Cross with me and gave me the introduction to the people at Caminnish. You know the rest. After I'd been a day in Carninnish I began to think I had a chance, until I saw you come into the room for tea."

He lapsed into silence. Grant noticed that his hands were trembling.

"What made you think that the money you say Sorrell left with you was all he had?"

"Because it was the amount he had in his own private account at the bank. It was I who drew it for him more than a week before he was due to sail. He drew it all but a pound."

"Were you in the habit of drawing money for him?"

"No; hardly ever. But that week he was terribly busy settling affairs at the office and clearing up generally."

"Why did he draw it so soon if he did not need it to pay his fare, as he evidently didn't?"

"I don't know, unless he was afraid he wouldn't have enough in the business ac-count to pay off all the accounts. But he had. He didn't leave a ha'penny owing."

"Was business good?"

"Yes; not bad. As good as it ever is in the winter. We do very little National Hunt betting—did, I mean. During the 'flat' it was good enough."

"At the end of the winter would be a lean season with Sorrell, then?"

"Yes."

"And you handed the money to Sorrell—when?"

"Directly I got back from the bank."

"You say you quarrelled with Sorrell about the revolver. Can you prove the revolver was yours?"

"No; how can I? No one knew about it because it was locked up—no one but Bert, I mean. It was loaded, just the way it was when the Armistice came. It wasn't a thing to leave about."

"And what do you suggest that Sorrell wanted it for?"

"I don't know, I haven't the remotest idea. I did think of suicide, It looked like that, But then there was no reason for it."

"When you said to me at Carninnish that in your opinion a woman had killed Sorrell, what did you mean?"

"Well, you see, I knew all Bert's men friends, and he didn't have any girl ones—I mean girls that are more than acquaintances. But I always thought there might have been a woman before I knew him. He was very quiet about the things he cared about, and he wouldn't have told me in any case. I have seen him sometimes get letters in a woman's handwriting, but he never re-marked about them, and Bert wasn't the kind you teased about that sort of thing."

"Has a letter of that sort arrived for him lately—within the past six months, say?"

Lamont thought for a while and said yes, he thought so.

"What kind of writing?"

"Biggish, with very round letters."

"You have read the description of the dagger that killed Sorrell. Have you ever handled one like it?"

"I not only never handled one but I never saw one.

"Have you any suggestions as to who or what this hypothetical woman might have been?"

"No."

"Do you mean to say that you were this man's intimate friend for years—actually lived with him for four years—and yet know nothing of his past?"

"I know quite a lot about his past, but not that. You didn't know Bert or you wouldn't expect him to tell me. He wasn't secretive in ordinary things—only in special things."

"Why was he going to America?"

"I don't know. I told you I thought he hadn't been happy lately. He never was exactly bubbling over, but lately—well, it's been more of an atmosphere than anything you could give a name to."

"Was he going alone?"

"Yes."

"Not with a woman?"

"Certainly not," said Lamont sharply, as if Grant had insulted him or his friend.

"How do you know?"

Lamont hunted round in his mind, evidently at a loss. He was quite obviously facing the possibility for the first time that his friend had intended to go abroad with some one and had not told him. Grant could see him considering the proposition and rejecting it. "I don't know how I know, but I do know. He would have told me that."

"Then you deny having any knowledge as to how Sorrell met his end?"

"I do. Don't you think, if I had any knowledge, I'd tell you all I knew?"

"I expect you would!" said Grant. "The very vagueness of your suspicions is a bad feature in your line of defence." He asked the constable to read out what he had written, and Lamont agreed that it coincided with what he had said, and signed each page with a none too steady hand. As he signed the last he said, "I'm feeling rotten. Can I lie down now?" Grant gave him a draught which he had cadged from the doctor, and in fifteen minutes the prisoner was sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion, while his captor stayed awake and thought the statement over.

It was an extraordinarily plausible one. It fitted and dovetailed beautifully. Except for its fundamental improbability, it was difficult to fault it. The man had had an explanation for everything. Times and places, even motives fitted. His account of his sup-posed emotions, from the discovery of the loss of the revolver onwards, was a triumph of verisimilitude. Was it possible, even remotely possible, that the man's statement was true? Was this that thousandth case where circumstantial evidence, complete in every particular, was merely a series of accidents, completely unrelated and lying colossally in consequence? But then, the thinness of the man's story—that fundamental improbability! After all, he had had nearly a fortnight to carve out his explanation, plane it, polish it, and make it fit in every particular. It would be a poor wit that would not achieve a tolerably acceptable tale with life itself at stake. That there was no one to check the truth or otherwise of the vital points was at once his misfortune and his advantage. It occurred to Grant that the only way to check Lamont's explanation was to unearth Sorrell's story, for story, Grant felt, there must be. If he could dis-cover that Sorrell really intended suicide, it would go far to substantiate Lamont's story of the purloined revolver and the gift of money. And there Grant pulled himself up. Substantiate Lamont's story? Was there a possibility of such a thing coming to pass? If that were so, his whole case went up in smoke, Lamont was not guilty, and he had arrested the wrong man. But was there within the bounds of possibility a coincidence which would put in one theatre queue two men, both left-handed, both scarred on a finger of that hand, and both acquaintances of the dead man, and therefore his potential murderers? He refused to believe it. It was not the credibility of the man's tale that had thrown dust in his eyes, but the extraordinary credibility of the manner of telling it. And what was that but plausibility!

His mind continued to go round and round the thing. In the man's favour—there he was again!—was the fact that the fingerprints on the revolver and those on the letter containing the money were the same. If the prints he had sent from Carninnish proved to be the same as these, then the man's story was true to that extent. The tale of Sorrell's letters from the feminine source could be checked by application to Mrs. Everett. Mrs. Everett evidently believed Lamont innocent, and had gone to considerable lengths in support of her conviction; but then she was prejudiced, and therefore not a competent judge.

Supposing, then, that the man's tale was a concocted one, what combination of circumstances would explain his murdering Sorrel? Was it possible that he had resented his friend's departure without offering to help him, so much that he could commit murder for it? But he had Sorrell's money in his possession. If he had obtained that money before Sorrell died, he would have no reason for killing him. And if he had not, then the money would have been found in Sorrell's possession. Or suppose he had obtained the money by stealing his friend's pocketbook during that afternoon, he would still have no urge to murder, and there would have been every reason to keep away from the queue. The more Grant thought of it, the more impossible it became to invent a really good theory as to why Lamont should have murdered Sorrell. Most of all in his favour was that he should have come to so public a place as a theatre queue to expostulate with his friend about something. It was not a usual preliminary to intended murder. But perhaps the murder had not been intended. Lamont did not give the impression of a man who would intend murder for very long at a time. Had the quarrel been not over the revolver at all but about something more bitter? Was there a woman in the case after all, for instance? For no reason Grant had a momentary recollection of Lamont's face when the Dinmont girl had gone out of the room as if he was not there, and the tones of his voice when he was telling of Sorrell's suspected romance, and he dismissed that theory.

But about business? Lamont had evidently felt his comparative poverty very keenly, and *had* resented his friend's lack of sympathy. Was his "fed up" a euphemism for a smouldering resentment that had blazed into hatred? But—after having had two hundred and twenty-three pounds—no, of course, he didn't know about that until afterwards. That might have been true, that tale of the packet, and he had taken it for granted that it contained the expected watch. After all, one does not expect to be handed two hundred and twenty-three pounds by a departing friend whose whole fortune it is. That was possible to the point of probability. He had said goodbye, and afterwards—but what did he argue about? If he had come back to stab Sorrell, he would not have called attention to himself. And what had Sorrell intended to do? If Lamont's story were true, then the only explanation of Sorrell's conduct was intended suicide. The more Grant thought, the more certain he became that only light on Sorrell's history would elucidate the problem and prove Lamont's guilt or —incredible!—innocence. His first business when he was back in town would be to do what he had neglected in his hurry to get Lamont—find Sorrell's luggage and go through it. And if that yielded nothing, he would see Mrs. Everett again. He would like to meet Mrs. Everett once more!

He took a last look at the calmly sleeping Lamont, and said a last word to the stolidly wakeful constable, and composed himself to sleep, worried, but filled with resolution. This business was not going to be left where it was.

15—The Brooch

After a hot bath, during which he had twiddled his toes in the wavering steam and tried to mesmerize himself into that habitually comfortable frame of mind of a detective officer who has got his man, Grant repaired to the Yard and went to interview his chief. When he came into the great man's presence Barker was complimentary.

"Congratulations, Grant!" he said. "That was very smart work altogether." And he asked for details of the capture which Grant had not, of course, included in his official report, and Grant provided him with a vivid sketch of the three days at Carninnish. The superintendent was highly amused.

"Well done!" he said. "Rather you than me. Careering across bogs was never a sport of mine. It seems you were the right man in the right place this time, Grant."

"Yes," said Grant unenthusiastically.

"You don't let your emotions run away with you, do you?" said Barker, grinning at his unsmiling face.

"Well, it's been luck, mostly, and I made one bad break."

"What was that?"

"I found out that Sorrell had really intended to go to America—at least, that he had booked a berth—and I forgot that his belongings would be lying at a terminus waiting to be examined."

"That doesn't sound a very vital mistake to me. You knew who the man was and who his friends were. What more could you find out that would help you to Lamont?"

"Nothing about Lamont. It was because I was so hard on Lamont's trail that I forgot about the luggage. But I want to know more about Sorrell. To tell you the truth," he added in a sudden burst, "I'm not very happy about this case."

Barker's jaw dropped just a little. "What's wrong?" he said. "It's the clearest case the Yard has had for some time."

"Yes; on the surface. But, if you dig a bit, there seems to be more than meets the eye."

"What do you mean? That there was more than one in it?"

"No; I mean that there's just the barest possibility that we've got the wrong one."

For a little there was silence. "Grant," said Barker at last, "I never knew you to lose your nerve before. You need a holiday. I don't think scooting across moors can be good for you. Perhaps the jogging movement is addling to the brain. You certainly have lost your critical faculty."

Grant could find nothing to say except "Well, here's the statement he gave us last night," and he handed it over. While Barker was reading it, he crossed to the window, gazed at the patch of green and the river in the sun, and wondered if he were making a complete fool of himself to be worrying when he had a good case. Well, fool or no fool, he would go along to Waterloo as soon as his chief had finished with him, and see what he could pick up there.

When Barker dropped the statement with a little flop on to the table, Grant turned eagerly to see what effect it had had on him. "Well," said that worthy, "it leaves me with a strong desire to meet Mr. Lamont."

"Why?" asked Grant.

"Because I'd like to see in person the man who tried sob-stuff on Inspector Grant and got away with it. The unimpressionable Grant!"

"That's how it strikes you, is it?" Grant said gloomily. "You don't believe a word of it?"

"Not a word," said Barker cheerfully. "It's about the thinnest story I've known put up for some time. But then I should think the man was hard put to it to find any way out of the evidence at all. He did his damnedest—I will say that for him."

"Well, look at it from the other way, and can you think of a reasonable explanation for Lamont's killing Sorrell?"

"Tut, tut, Grant, you've been at the Yard for I don't know how many years, and you're looking at this late stage for reason-able murders. You need a holiday, man. Lamont probably killed Sorrell because the way he ate had got on his nerves. Besides, it isn't any of our business to fit psychology to people or to provide motives or anything of that sort. So don't worry your head. Fit them with good watertight evidence and provide them with a cell, and that's all we have to bother about."

There was a short silence, and Grant gathered up his papers preparatory to taking his leave and getting along to Waterloo.

"Look here," said Barker out of the silence, "all joshing apart—do you believe the man didn't do it?"

"I don't see how he could *not have*," Grant said. "There's the evidence. I can't say why I'm uneasy about the thing, but that doesn't alter the fact that I am."

"Is this an example of the famous flair?" said Barker, with a return to his former manner.

But Grant would not be other than serious this morning. "No; I think it's just that I have seen Lamont and talked to him when he was telling his story, and you haven't."

"That's what I said to begin with," Barker reminded him. "Lamont has tried a sob-story on you and put it over...Put it out of your head, Grant, until you get even a tittle of evidence to substantiate it. Flair is all very well, and I don't deny that you have been uncanny once or twice, but it has always been more or less in accordance with the evidence before, and in this case it most emphatically isn't."

"That's the very thing that makes me worry most. Why *should* I not be pleased with the case as it stands? What is it that makes me *not* pleased? There is something, but I'm blowed if I can see what it is. I keep feeling that something is wrong somewhere. I want something that will either tighten up the evidence against Lamont or loosen it."

"Well, well," said Barker good-humouredly, "go ahead. You've done so well so far that you can afford to play your-self for a few days more. The evidence is good enough for the police court—or any other kind of court, for that of it."

So Grant betook himself through the sunny, busy morning to Waterloo, trailing a little cloud of discontent behind him as he went. As he stepped from the warm pavement into the cool vault of the best but saddest of all London stations—the very name of it reeks of endings and partings—gloom sat on his face like a portent. Having obtained the necessary authority to open any luggage that Sorrell

might have left, he re-paired to the left-luggage room, where a highly interested official said, "Yes, sir, I know them. Left about a fortnight ago, they were," and led him to the luggage in question. It consisted of two well-worn trunks, and it occurred to Grant that neither was labelled with the Rotterdam-Manhattan company's labels as they should have been if Sorrell had intended going aboard at Southampton. Nor were they addressed at all. On ordinary labels on each was written in Sorrell's writing, "A. Sorrell," but nothing else. With his own keys and a slight quickening of heart he opened them. Below the top garment in the first were Sorrell's passport and tickets for the voyage. Why had he left them there? Why not have taken them with him in a pocketbook? But along-side them were the labels supplied by the company for the labelling of passengers' luggage. Perhaps for some reason Sorrell had meant to open the trunk again before going down on the boat-train, and had postponed labelling it till then. And had left his tickets and passport there as being safer than a pocketbook in a queue.

Grant continued his examination. There was no further indication that Sorrell had not intended to go abroad as he said. The clothes were packed with a care and neatness that surely argued a further use for them. There was method, too, in the manner of their disposition. The articles which would presumably be needed first were there to hand, and the less necessary ones farther down. It was difficult, looking at the packing, to believe that Sorrell had not intended to take out the articles himself at some future time. And there was no information, no letters, no photographs. That last struck Grant as the only remarkable thing about the luggage—that a man who was going abroad should have no souvenirs of any sort with him. And then he came on them, packed at the bottom between two shoes —a little bundle of snapshots. Hastily he untied the piece of string that held them together, and looked them through. At least half of them were photographs of Gerald Lamont, either alone or with Sorrell, and the rest were old army groups. The only women in the collection were Mrs. Everett and some VAD's who seemed to be incidental to the army groups. Grant almost groaned aloud in his disappointment—he had untied that string with such mighty if vague hopes—but when he had tied up the bundle again he put it in his pocket. VAD's might be incidental in a group, but individually they were women and, as such, not to be despised.

And that was all! That was all he was going to get from the luggage he had been banking so heavily on. Troubled and disappointed, he began to put the things back as he had found them. As he lifted a coat to fold it, something fell from a pocket and rolled along the floor of the left-luggage room. It was a small blue velvet case such as jewellers use for their wares. No terrier is quicker on a rat than Grant was on that small slowly revolving box, and no girl's heart beat at the opening of a velvet case as Grant's heart beat at the opening of that one. A press with his thumb and the lid flew up. On the deep blue lining lay a brooch such as women wear in their hats. It was made from small pearls in the form of a monogram, and was very simple and rather beautiful. "M. R.," said Grant aloud. Margaret Ratcliffe.

His brain had said it before his thoughts had time to gather round it. He stared at the trinket for a little, took it up from its velvet bed, turned it in his hand, and put it back again. Was this his clue, after all? And did these common-enough initials point to the woman who kept stumbling into this case so persistently? It was she that had stood behind Sorrell when he was killed; it was she that had booked a berth on the same day on the same ship to the same destination as Sorrell; and now the only thing of value found among his belongings was a brooch with her initials. He examined it again. It did not look the kind of thing that is sold by the dozen, and the name on the box was not that of a firm usually patronized by impecunious young bookmakers. It was that of a Bond Street firm of good reputation, with wares corresponding in price. He thought that, on the whole, his best step would be to go and see Messrs. Gallio & Stein. He locked up the trunks, put the brooch in his pocket with the snapshots, and departed from Waterloo. As he mounted the stairs of a bus he remembered that Lamont had said that the notes he had been given by Sorrell had been wrapped in white paper such as jewellers use. One more good mark for Lamont. But if Sorrell were going abroad in the company of, or because of, Margaret Ratcliffe, why should he hand over such a sum to Lamont? Mrs. Ratcliffe had money of her own, Simpson had reported, but no man started out to live on the woman he was eloping with, even if he was sorry to leave his friend in comparative poverty.

The business of Messrs. Gallio & Stein is conducted in a small and rather dark shop in Old Bond Street, and Grant found but one assistant visible. As soon as Grant opened the blue box the man recognized the brooch. It was he that had dealt with the customer about it. No; they did not have them in stock. It had been made to order for a Mr. Sorrell, a young fair man. It had cost thirty guineas, and had been finished—he consulted a book—on the 6th, a Tuesday, and Mr. Sorrell had called and paid for it and taken it away with him on that date. No; the assistant had never seen the man before. He had described what he wanted, and had made no fuss about the price.

Grant went away thinking deeply, but no nearer a solution. That a man in Sorrell's position had been willing to pay thirty guineas for an ornament argued infatuation of an extreme type. He had not presented it to the object of his devotion up to the time of his departure. That meant that it could be presented only after he had left Britain. It was packed deep in his trunk. He had no friends in America that any one knew of. But—Margaret Ratcliffe was going out by the same boat. That woman! How she came into things! And her entry, instead of making things clearer, merely made the muddle worse than before. For muddle Grant was now convinced there was.

It was nearly lunchtime, but he went back to the Yard because he was expecting a mes-sage from the post office. It was there waiting for him. On the morning of the 14th (Wednesday) a telegram had been handed in at Brixton High Street post office addressed to Albert Sorrell on board the *Queen of Arabia*, and reading "Sorry.—JERRY." It had presumably been delivered, since there had been no word to the contrary, but it was not unlikely that, in the shoal of telegrams attending the departure of a big liner, if it had not been claimed, it might have been mislaid.

"So that's that!" said Grant aloud; and Williams, who was in attendance, said, "Yes, sir," accommodatingly.

And now what? He wanted to see Mrs. Ratcliffe, but he did not know whether she had returned home. If he rang to inquire, she would be forewarned of his renewed interest in her. He would have to send Simpson again. Mrs. Ratcliffe would have to wait for the moment. He would go and see Mrs. Everett instead. He gave Simpson his instructions, and after lunch went down to Fulham.

Mrs. Everett opened the door to him, with no sign of fear or embarrassment. From the expression of her eyes, her hostility was too great to permit of her harbouring any other emotion. What line should he take with her? The stern official one would be useless both from the point of impressing her and from the point of extracting information; the dead man had done well to call her Lady Macbeth. And a magnanimous overlooking of the part she had played in Lamont's escape would also have no effect. Flattery would earn nothing but her scorn. It occurred to him that the only method of dealing with her to any ad-vantage was to tell her the truth.

"Mrs. Everett," he said, when she had led him in, "we have a case that will hang Gerald Lamont, but I'm not satisfied myself with the evidence. So far, I haven't caught Lamont out in a misstatement, and there is just the faintest possibility that his story is true. But no jury will believe it. It is a very thin tale, and, told badly in a court of law, would be beyond belief. But I feel that a little more information will tip the scales one way or another—either prove Lamont's guilt beyond a doubt or acquit him. So I've come to you. If he's innocent, then the chances are that the extra information will go to prove that, and not his guilt. And so I've come to you for the information."

She examined him in silence, trying to read his motive through the camouflage of his words.

"I've told you the truth," he said, "and you can take it or leave it. It isn't any softness for Gerald Lamont that has brought me here, I assure you. It's a matter of my own professional pride. If there's any possibility of a mistake, then I've got to worry at the case until I'm sure I've got the right man."

"What do you want to know?" she said, and it sounded like a capitulation. At least it was a compromise.

"In the first place, what letters habitually came for Sorrell, and where did they come from?"

"He got very few letters altogether. He had not many friends on these terms."

"Did you ever know letters addressed in a woman's hand come for him?"

"Yes; occasionally."

"Where were they posted?"

"In London, I think."

"What was the writing like?"

"Very round and regular and rather large."

"Do you know who the woman was?"

"How long had the letters been coming for him?"

"Oh, for years! I don't remember how long."

"And in all these years you never found out who his correspondent was?"

"Did no woman ever come to see him here?"

"No."

"How often did the letters come?"

"Oh, not often! About once in six weeks, perhaps, or a little oftener."

"Lamont has said that Sorrell was secretive. Is that so?"

"No, not secretive. But he was jealous. I mean jealous of the things he liked. When he cared very much about a thing he would—hug it to himself, if you know what I mean."

"Did the arrival of the letters make any difference to him—make him pleased or otherwise?"

"No; he didn't show any feeling that way. He was very quiet, you know."

"Tell me," said Grant, and produced the velvet case, "have you ever seen that before?" He snapped it open to her gaze.

"M. R.," she said slowly, just as Grant had done. "No; I never saw it before. What has that got to do with Bertie?"

"That was found in the pocket of a coat in Sorrell's trunk."

She put her worn hand out for it, looked at it with curiosity, and gave it back to him.

"Can you suggest any reason why Sorrell should commit suicide?"

"No, I can't. But I can tell you that about a week before he left to go—left here—a small parcel came by post for him. It was waiting for him when he came home one evening. He came home that night before Jerry—Mr. Lamont."

"Do you mean as small a parcel as this?"

"Not quite, but as big as that would be with wrapping round it."

But the man in Gallio & Stein's had said that Sorrell had taken the brooch away with him. "Can you remember what day that was?"

"I wouldn't swear to it, but I think it was the Thursday before he left."

On Tuesday, Sorrell had taken the little parcel from the jeweller, and on Thursday evening the little parcel had been delivered at Sorrell's rooms. The inference was obvious. The woman had refused his offering.

"What was the writing on the parcel like?"

"It was addressed only on the label, and the address was printed."

"Did Sorrell show any emotion on opening it?"

"I wasn't there when he opened it."

"Then afterwards?"

"No; I don't think so. He was very quiet. But then he was always quiet."

"I see. When did Lamont come and tell you what had happened?"

"On Saturday."

"You knew before then that the man in the queue was Sorrell?"

"No; the description of the man wasn't published in full until Thursday, and I naturally thought that Bert had sailed on Wednesday. I knew that Jerry would have been with him up to the last minute, so I didn't worry. It was only when I saw the description of the man the police wanted that I put the two descriptions together and began to wonder. That was on Saturday."

"And what did you think then?"

"I thought, as I think now, that there was a very bad mistake somewhere."

"Will you tell me what Lamont told you? He has made a statement to us already."

She hesitated a moment and then said, "Well, I can't see that things can be worse than they are," and told him the story Lamont had told her. To the smallest detail it coincided with what he had told Grant and the constable in the train coming south.

"And you didn't find anything fishy in such a story?"

"I don't know that I would have believed the story from a stranger"—she was extraordinarily like her niece at that moment, the

inspector thought—"but, you see, I know Jerry Lamont."

"But you knew Sorrell very much longer, and didn't know the things that mattered in his life."

"Yes, but that was Bertie. Length of time has nothing to do with it. I heard about everything that happened to Jerry, girls included."

"Well, thank you for telling me all you did," Grant said as he stood up. "If nothing you have said helps Lamont very much, at least it doesn't incriminate him any further. Did you ever have any reason to think that Sorrell wasn't going to America at all?"

"Do you mean that he was going somewhere else?"

"No; I mean that, if he contemplated suicide, his going to America might have been an elaborate blind."

"I certainly don't think that. I'm sure he intended to go to America."

Grant thanked her again, and went back to the Yard. From Simpson he learned that Mrs. Ratcliffe and her sister were still at Eastbourne, and there was no word of their return.

"Does Mr. Ratcliffe go up and down to Eastbourne, then?"

No; Mr. Ratcliffe had been down only once since they were there, and then he didn't stay the night.

"Did you find out what the quarrel was about?"

No; the maid apparently had not known. From the secret amusement that radiated from Simpson's freckled face Grant deduced that the interview with the Ratcliffe maid had been more amusing than informative, and he dismissed him dolefully. He would have to go down to Eastbourne and see Mrs. Ratcliffe—accidentally; but to-morrow he would have to attend the Lamont case at the police court. It would be a purely formal occasion, but he would have to be there. There was no time to go down to Eastbourne tonight, and get back, with any hope of obtaining the casual kind of meeting with Mrs. Ratcliffe that he contemplated. But, if the case was over quickly to-morrow, he would go straight down there. He wished duty did not call him to the court. That was routine, and the visit to Mrs. Ratcliffe was not—it was a hunt, a sporting chance, a gamble. He wanted so badly to see what Margaret Ratcliffe's face would look like when he showed her the monogrammed brooch.

16—Miss Dinmont Assists

Gowbridge police court is at no time a cheerful building. It has the mouldering atmosphere of a mausoleum combined with the disinfected and artificial cheerfulness of a hospital, the barrenness of a schoolroom, the stuffiness of a tube, and the ugliness of a meeting-house. Grant knew it well, and he never entered it without an unconscious groan, not for the sorrows that hung about it like invisible webs, but for his own sorrow in having to pass a morning in such surroundings. It was on occasions such as a morning in Gowbridge Police Court that he was wont to refer to his profession as a dog's life. And today he was in a bad mood. He found him-self looking with a jaundiced eye on the rank and file of the force as represented by those on duty in the court, on the hearty and self-sufficient magistrate, on the loafers on the public benches. Conscious of his nauseated mental condition, he hunted round as usual for the reason with a view of banishing it and, after a little cogitation, ran it to earth. He was unhappy about giving his evidence! At the bottom of his heart he wanted to say, "Wait a bit! There's something here that I don't understand. Just wait till I find out a little more." But, being a police inspector with perfectly good evidence and the countenance of his superiors, he could not do that. He could not qualify what he had to say with any remarks of that sort. He glanced across the court to where the lawyer who had Lamont's case was sitting. Lamont would want some bigger guns than that when he came up for his trial at the Old Bailey or he wouldn't have a dog's chance. But big guns cost money, and lawyers are professional men, not philanthropists.

Two cases were summarily dealt with, and then Lamont was brought into court. He looked ill, but was perfectly collected. He even acknowledged the inspector's presence with a slight smile. His arrival created a stir in the public part of the court. There had been no press warning that the case would be dealt with there today, and all those present were either curious idlers or friends of principles in other cases. Grant had looked for Mrs. Everett, but she was not there. Lamont's sole friend in court seemed to be the paid one who had charge of his interests. Nevertheless, Grant looked again now for a sign of personal interest on any face. He had found before now that useful information can be obtained from the expressions of presumed strangers in the body of a court. But a careful scrutiny revealed nothing; nothing but curiosity was apparent on any countenance in the audience. But as he left the box, after giving his evidence, he saw a newcomer at the back of the court, and the newcomer was Miss Dinmont. Now Miss Dinmont's holiday did not finish for a week yet, and she had said at that fateful manse 'tea that since she had holidays only once a year she spent them all at home; and as he sat down Inspector Grant was marvel-ling at the girl who would not soften to-wards a man she believed to be guilty of a terrible thing, but who would cut short her holiday and travel five hundred miles to hear the evidence for herself. Lamont had his back to her, and it was unlikely, unless he deliberately looked round the room as he went out, that he would be aware of her presence. She caught the inspector's eye upon her, and bowed to him, unperturbed. In her neat, dark tailor-made and small hat she looked the complete, selfpossessed, charming woman of the world. She might have been a writer looking for copy, for all the emotion she showed. Even when Lamont was remanded and led out of court, her good-looking face was not stirred. They were very alike, aunt and niece, Grant thought: that was probably why they did not like each other. He went up to her as she was leaving and greeted her.

"Are you doing anything, Miss Dinmont? Come and have lunch with me, will you?"

"I thought inspectors lived on tablets of condensed beef extract, or something like that, during the day. Do they really have time to sit down to a meal?"

"Not only that, but they have a very good one. Come and see!" And she smiled and came.

He took her to Laurent's, and over the meal she was quite frank about her change of plans. "I couldn't stay in Carninnish after what happened," she said. "And I had an itch to hear the court proceedings, so I just came. I have never been in a court of law in my life before. It isn't an impressive spectacle."

"Not a police court, perhaps," he admitted; "but wait till you see a big trial."

"I hope I never shall—but it seems that I'm going to. You have a beautiful case, haven't you?"

"That is the word my chief uses about it."

"And don't you agree?" she asked quickly.

"Oh, yes, certainly." To admit to Mrs. Everett that he was not satisfied was one thing, but he was not going to blazon it abroad. And this independent girl was certainly "abroad."

Presently she mentioned Lamont directly. "He looks bad," she said judicially, using "bad" in her professional sense. "Will they look after him in prison?"

"Oh, yes," said Grant; "they take very good care of them."

"Is there any chance of their badgering him? Because I warn you he won't stand any badgering as he is now. Either he'll be seriously ill or he'll say that he did it."

"Then you don't believe he did?"

"I think it's unlikely, but I'm quite aware that the fact that I think so doesn't make it so. I just want him to get a fair deal."

Grant remarked on her matter-of-fact acceptance of his word at Carninnish as to the man's guilt.

"Well," she said, "you knew much more about it than I did. I never saw him till three days previously. I liked him—but that didn't make him guilty or innocent. Besides, I'd rather be a brute than a fool."

Grant considered this unfeminine pronouncement in silence, and she repeated her question.

"Oh, no," Grant said; "this isn't America. And in any case, he has made his statement, as you heard, and he is not likely to change his mind or make another."

"Has he any friends?"

"Only your aunt, Mrs. Everett."

"And who will pay for his defence?"

Grant explained.

"Then he can't have any of the good ones. That doesn't seem to me particularly fair—for the law to keep famous lawyers to do their

prosecuting and not famous lawyers to defend poor criminals."

Grant grinned. "Oh, he'll have a fair deal, don't you worry. It is the police who are harried round in a murder case."

"Did you never, in all your experience, know a case where the law made a mistake?"

"Yes, several," Grant admitted cheerfully. "But they were all cases of mistaken identity. And that's not in question here."

"No; but there must be cases where the evidence is nothing but a lot of things that have nothing to do with each other put together until they look like something. Like a patchwork bedcover."

She was getting too "hot" to be comfortable in her search after enlightenment, and Grant reassured her and unostentatiously changed the subject—and presently fell silent; a sudden idea had occurred to him. If he went down to Eastbourne alone, Mrs. Ratcliffe, however casual his appearance, might be suspicious of his bona fides. But if he appeared with a woman companion he would be accepted at once as off duty, and any suspicion his presence might arouse would be lulled until he could get Mrs. Ratcliffe completely off her guard. And the whole success of the expedition depended on that—that she should be unprepared for any demonstration on his part.

"Look here," he said, "are you doing anything this afternoon?"

"No; why?"

"Have you done your good deed for the day?"

"No, I think I've been entirely selfish today."

"Well, get it off your chest by coming down to Eastbourne with me this afternoon as my cousin, and being my cousin till dinner. Will you?"

She considered him gravely. "I don't think so. Are you on the track of some other unhappy person?"

"Not exactly. I'm on the track of something, I think."

"I don't think so," she said slowly. "If it were just fun, I'd do it like a shot. But when it means something I don't know for someone I've never met—you see?"

"I say, I can't tell you about it, but if I give you my word that you'll never regret it, will you believe me and come?"

"But why should I believe you?" she said sweetly.

The inspector was rather staggered. He had commended her lack of faith in Lamont, but her logical application of it to himself disconcerted him.

"I don't know why," he admitted. "I sup-pose police officers are just as capable of fibbing as any one."

"And considerably more unscrupulous than most," she added dryly.

"Well, it's just a matter for your own decision, then. You won't regret coming. I'll swear to that, if you like—and police officers are not given to perjury, however unscrupulous they may be."

She laughed. "That got you, didn't it?" she said delightedly. And after a pause, "Yes, I'll come and be your cousin with pleasure. None of my cousins are half as good-looking." But the mockery in her tone was too apparent for Grant to find much pleasure in the compliment.

They went down through the green countryside to the sea, however, in perfect amity, and when Grant looked up suddenly and saw the downs he was surprised. There they stood in possession of the landscape, like some one who has tiptoed into a room unheard, and startles the occupant by appearing in the middle of the floor. He had never known a journey to the south coast pass so quickly. They were alone in the compartment, and he proceeded to give her her bearings.

"I am staying down at Eastbourne—no, I can't be, I'm not dressed for the part—we've both come down for the afternoon, then. I am going to get into conversation with two women who know me already in my professional capacity. When the talk turns on hat brooches I want you to produce this from your bag, and say that you have just bought it for your sister. Your name, by the way, is Eleanor Raymond, and your sister's is Mary. That is all. Just leave the brooch lying round until I arrange my tie. That will be the signal that I have had all I want."

"All right. What is your first name, by the way?"

"Alan.

"All right, Alan. I nearly forgot to ask you that. It would have been a joke if I had not known my cousin's name!...It's a queer world, isn't it? Look at those primroses in the sun and think of all the people in terrible trouble this minute."

"No, don't. That way madness lies. Think of the pleasantly deserted beach we're going to see in a few minutes."

"Do you ever go to the Old Vic?" she asked, and they were still tolling each other how wonderful Miss Baylis was when they ran into the station; and Grant said, "Come on, Eleanor," and, grabbing her by the arm, picked her from the carriage like a small boy, impatient to try a spade on the sands.

The beach, as Grant had prophesied, was in that pleasantly deserted condition that makes the south-coast resorts so attractive out of the season. It was sunny and very warm, and a few groups lay about on the shingle, basking in the sun in an aristocratic isolation unknown to summer visitors.

"We'll go along the front and come back along the beach," Grant said. "They are bound to be out on a day like this."

"Heaven send they aren't on the downs," she said. "I don't mind walking, but it would take till tomorrow to quarter these."

"I think the downs are ruled out. The lady I am interested in isn't much of a walker, I should say."

"What is her name?"

"No, I won't tell you that until I introduce you. You are supposed not to have heard of her, and it will be better if you really haven't."

They walked in silence along the trim front towards Holywell. Everything was trim, with that well-ordered trimness that is so typically Eastbourne. Even the sea was trim—and slightly exclusive. And Beachy Head had the air of having been set down there as a good finish off to the front, and of being perfectly conscious of the fact. They had not been walking for more than ten minutes when Grant said, "We'll go down to the beach now. I'm almost certain we passed the couple I want some time ago. They are down on the shingle."

They left the pavement and began a slow foot-slipping stroll back to the piers again. Presently they approached two women who were reclining in deck-chairs facing the sea. One, the slighter one, was curled up with her back to Miss Dinmont and the inspector, and was apparently reading. The other was snowed round with magazines, writing-pad, sunshade, and all the other recognized paraphernalia of an afternoon on the beach, but she was doing nothing and appeared to be half asleep. As they came abreast of the chairs the inspector let his glance fall casually on them and then stopped.

"Why, Mrs. Ratcliffe!" he said. "Are you down here recuperating? What glorious weather!"

Mrs. Ratcliffe, after one startled glance, welcomed him. "You remember my sister, Miss Lethbridge?"

Grant shook hands and said, "I don't think you know my cousin—"

But the gods were good to Grant that day. Before he could commit himself, Miss Lethbridge said in her pleasant drawl:

"Good heavens, if it isn't Dandie Dinmont! How are you, my dear woman?"

"Do you know each other, then?" asked Grant, feeling like a man who has opened his eyes to find that one more step would have taken him over a precipice.

"Rather!" said Miss Lethbridge. "I had my appendicitis in a room at St. Michael's, and Dandie Dinmont held my head and my hand alternately. And she held them very well, I will say that for her. Shake hands with Miss Dinmont, Meg. My sister, Mrs. Ratcliffe. Who'd have thought you had cousins in the force!"

"I suppose you are recuperating too, Inspector?" Mrs. Ratcliffe said.

"You could call it that, I suppose," the inspector said. "My cousin is on holiday from Mike's, and I have finished my case, so we are making a day of it."

"Well, it isn't teatime yet," said Miss Lethbridge. "Sit down and talk to us for a little. I haven't seen Dandie for ages."

"You'll be glad to have that awful case off your hands, Inspector," her sister said as they subsided on the shingle. She spoke as though the murder had been just as much of an event in Grant's life as it had been in hers, but the inspector let it pass, and presently the talk veered away from the murder and went via health, restaurants, hotels, and food to dress, or the lack of it.

"I love your hat brooch," said Miss Dinmont idly to her friend. "I can think of nothing but hat brooches this afternoon, be-cause we've just been buying one for a mutual cousin who is getting married. You know—like getting a new coat and seeing people's coats as you never saw them before. I have it here somewhere." She reached for her bag without altering her reclining position, and rummaged in it until she produced the blue velvet box. "What do you think of it?" She opened it and extended it to them.

"Oh, lovely!" said Miss Lethbridge, but Mrs. Ratcliffe said nothing for a little.

"M. R.," she said at last. "Why, the initials are the same as mine. What is your cousin's name?"

"Mary Raymond."

"Sounds like a goody-goody heroine out of a book," remarked Miss Lethbridge. "Is she goody?"

"No, not particularly, though she's marrying an awful stodge. You like it, then?"

"Rather!" said Miss Lethbridge.

"Beautiful!" said her sister. "May I have a look at it?" She took the case in her hands, examined the brooch back and front, and handed it back. "Beautiful!" she said again. "And most uncommon. Can you get them ready-made, so to speak?"

Grant's infinitesimal shake of the head answered Miss Dinmont's cry for help. "No, we had it made," she said.

"Well, she's a lucky devil, Mary Raymond, and if she doesn't like it, she has very poor taste."

"Oh, if she doesn't like it," said Grant, "she can just fib and say she does, and we'll never be a bit the wiser. All women are expert fibbers."

"'Ark at 'im!" said Miss Lethbridge. "Poor disillusioned creature!"

"Well, isn't it true? Your social-life is one long series of fibs. You are very sorry—You are not at home—You would have come, but —You wish some one would stay longer. If you aren't fibbing to your friends, you are fibbing to your maids."

"I may fib to my friends," said Mrs. Ratcliffe, "but I most certainly do not fib to my maids!"

"Don't you?" said Grant, turning idly to look at her. No one, to see him there, with his hat tilted over his eyes and his body lounging, would have said that Inspector Grant was on duty. "You were going to the United States the day after the murder, weren't you?" She nodded calmly. "Well, why did you tell your maid that you were going to Yorkshire?"

Mrs. Ratcliffe made a movement to sit erect and then sank back again. "I don't know what you're talking about. I most certainly never told my maid I was going to Yorkshire. I said New York."

That was so patently possible that Grant hastened to get in first with, "Well, she thinks you said Yorkshire," before Mrs. Ratcliffe inevitably said, "How do you know?"

"There isn't anything a police inspector doesn't know," he said.

"There isn't anything he won't do, you mean," she said angrily. "Have you been walking out with Annie? I shouldn't be surprised if you suspected me of having done the murder myself."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Grant. "Inspectors suspect all the world."

"Well, I suppose I can only give thanks that your suspicions led to nothing worse than walking out my maid."

Grant caught Miss Dinmont's eyes on him under the short brim of her hat, and there was a new expression in them. The conversation had given away the fact that Mrs. Ratcliffe had some connexion with the queue murder, and Miss Dinmont was being given furiously to think. Grant smiled reassuringly at her. "They don't think I'm nice to know," he said. "But at least you can stick up for me. Justice is the thing I live for." Surely she must see, if she thought about it, that his inquiries in this direction could not be very incriminating to Lamont. The chances must be the other way about.

"Let's go and have tea," Miss Lethbridge said. "Come along to our hotel. Or shall we go somewhere else, Meg? I'm sick of anchovy sandwiches and currant cake."

Grant suggested a tea-shop which had a reputation for cakes, and began to bundle Mrs. Ratcliffe's scattered belongings together. As he did so, he let the writing-pad drop so that it fell open on the sand, the first sheet exhibiting a half-written letter. Staring up at him in the bright sunlight were the round large letters of Mrs. Ratcliffe's script. "Sorry!" he said, and restored the block to the pile of papers

and magazines.

Tea as a gastronomic function might have been a success, but as a social occasion Grant felt that it failed miserably. Two out of his three companions regarded him with a distrust of which he could not fail to be conscious, and the third—Miss Lethbridge—was so cheerfully determined to pretend that she was not aware of her sister's ill humour that she tacitly confessed her own awareness of tension. When they had taken leave of each other, and Grant and his companion were on their way to the station in the fading light, he said, "You've been a brick, Miss Dinmont. I'll never forget it." But she did not answer. She was so quiet on the way home that his already discontented thoughts were further distracted. Why couldn't the girl trust him? Did she think him an ogre to make such unscrupulous use of her as she suspected. And all the time his looker-on half was smiling sardonically and saying, "You, a police inspector, asking for trust! Why, Machiavelli was fastidious compared with a C.I.D. man."

When Grant was at war with himself his mouth had a slight twist in it, and tonight the twist was very marked. He had found not one definite answer to the problems that troubled him. He did not know whether Mrs. Ratcliffe had recognized the brooch or not. He did not know whether she had said New York to her maid or not. And though he had seen her writing, that helped to no conclusion; a large percentage of women wrote large and very round hands. Her pause at the sight of the brooch might have been merely the pause while she read the twined initial. Her veiled questions as to its origin might have been entirely innocent. On the other hand, they most emphatically might not. If she had anything to do with the murder, it must be recognized that she was clever and not likely to give herself away. She had already fooled him once when he dismissed her so lightly from his mind on the first day of the investigations. There was nothing to prevent her from going on fooling him unless he found a damning fact that could not be explained away.

"What do you think of Mrs. Ratcliffe?" he asked Miss Dinmont. They were alone in the compartment except for a country yokel and his girl.

"Why?" she asked. "Is this merely making conversation, or is it more investigation?"

"I say, Miss Dinmont, are you sore with me?"

"I don't think that is the correct expression for what I feel," she said. "It isn't often I feel a fool, but I do tonight." And he was dismayed at the bitterness in her voice.

"But there's not the slightest need," he said, genuinely distressed. "You did the job like a professional, and there was nothing in it to make you feel like that. I'm up against something I don't understand, and I wanted you to help me. That's all. That's why I asked you about Mrs. Ratcliffe just now. I want a women's opinion to help me—an unbiased woman's opinion."

"Well, if you want my candid opinion, I think the woman is a fool."

"Oh? You don't think she's clever, deep down?"

"I don't think she has a deep down."

"You think she's just shallow? But surely—" He considered.

"Well, you asked me what I thought, and I've told you. I think she's a shallow fool."

"And her sister?" Grant asked, though that had nothing to do with the investigations.

"Oh, she is different. She has any amount of brain and personality, though you mightn't think so."

"Would you say that Mrs. Ratcliffe would commit a murder?"

"No, certainly not!"

"Why not?"

"Because she hasn't got the guts," said Miss Dinmont elegantly. "She might do the thing in a fit of temper, but all the world would know it the next minute, and ever afterwards as long as she lived."

"Do you think she might know about one and keep the knowledge to herself?"

"You mean the knowledge of who was guilty?"

"Yes."

Miss Dinmont sat looking searchingly at the inspector's impassive face. The lights of station lamps moved slowly over and past it as the train slid to a halt. "Eridge! Eridge!" called the porter, clumping down the deserted platform. The unexpectant voice had died into the distance, and the train had gathered itself into motion again before she spoke.

"I wish I could read what you are thinking," she said desperately. "Am I being your fool for the second time in one day?"

"Miss Dinmont, believe me, so far I have never known you do a foolish thing, and I'm willing to take a large bet I never shall."

"That might do for Mrs. Ratcliffe," she said. "But I'll tell you. I think she might keep quiet about a murder, but there would have to be a reason that mattered to *herself* overwhelmingly. That's all."

He was not sure whether the last two words meant that that was all that she could tell him, or whether it was an indication that pumping was to cease; but she had given him food for thought, and he was quiet until they ran into Victoria. "Where are you living?" he asked. "Not at the hospital?"

"No; I'm staying at my club in Cavendish Square."

He accompanied her there against her wish, and said good night on the doorstep, since she would not be persuaded to dine with him.

"You have some days of holiday yet," he said, with kindly intention. "How are you going to fill them in?"

"In the first place, I'm going to see my aunt. I have come to the conclusion that the evils one knows are less dreadful than the evils one doesn't know."

But the inspector caught the glint of the hall light on her teeth, and went away feeling less a martyr to injustice than he had for some hours past.

17—Solution

Grant was disconsolate. His radiance was dimmed as the Yard had never known it dimmed. He even snapped at the faithful Williams, and only the surprised hurt on that bland pink face recalled him to himself for a little. Mrs. Field blamed it unconditionally on the Scots: their food, their ways, their climate, and their country; and said dramatically to her husband, after the manner of a childish arithmetic, "If four days in a country like that makes him like this, what would a month do?" That was on the occasion when she was exhibiting to her better half the torn and muddy tweeds that Grant had brought back with him from his foray in the hills; but she made no secret of her beliefs and her prejudices, and Grant suffered her as mildly as his worried soul would permit. Back in the everyday routine and clearing-up arrears of work he would stop and ask himself, What had he left undone? What possible avenue of exploration had he left untravelled? He tried deliberately to stop himself from further questioning, to accept the general theory that the police case was too good to be other than true, to subscribe to Barker's opinion that he had "nerves" and needed a holiday. But it was no use. The feeling that there was some-thing wrong somewhere always flowed back the minute he stopped bullying himself. If anything, the conviction grew as the slow, unproductive, tedious days passed, and he would go back in his mind to that first day, little more than a fortnight ago, when he had viewed an unknown body, and go over the case again from there. Had he missed a point somewhere? There was the knife that had proved so barren a clue an individual thing to be so unproductive. Yet no one had claimed to have seen or owned one like it. All it had done was to provide the scar on the murderer's hand—a piece of evidence conclusive only when allied with much more.

There was this, there was that, there was the other, but all of them stood the strain of pulling apart, and remained in their separate entities what they had been in the pat-tern of the whole; and Grant was left, as before, with the belief, so strong and so un-reasonable that it amounted to superstition, that the monogrammed brooch in Sorrell's pocket was the key to the whole mystery; that it was shouting its tale at them, only they could not hear. It lay in his desk with the knife now, and the consciousness of it was with him continually. When he had nothing to do for the moment he would take both it and the knife from the drawer and sit there "mooning over them," as the sympathetic Williams reported to his subordinate. They were becoming a fetish with him. There was some connexion between the two—between the offering that Sorrell had made to a woman and the knife that had killed him. He felt that as strongly and distinctly as he felt the sunlight that warmed his hands as he played with the objects on the table. And yet both his own reason and that of others laughed at the idea. What had the brooch to do with the affair! Gerald Lamont had killed Sorrell with a small Italian knife—his grandmother had been Italian, and if he hadn't inherited the knife he had probably inherited the will to use one—after a quarrel in a queue. On his own showing he resented Sorrell's departure from Britain, leaving him jobless and more or less penniless. Sorrell had had the money to pay for his passage, but had not offered it. And on his own showing he had not known that Sorrell had given him any money until two days after the murder. Where did a pearl monogrammed brooch come into that? The little silver-andenamel knife was a piece de résistance in the case—a prince of exhibits. It would be photographed, paragraphed, and discussed in every house in England, and the little crack on its boss handle would hang a man. And all the time that pearl brooch, which would not appear in the case at all, glowed a silent and complete refutal of all their puny theories.

It was utterly ridiculous. Grant hated the sight of the thing, and yet he went back again and again to it as a man does to a mocking mistress. He tried "shutting his eyes"—his favourite resort in a difficulty—and either distracted himself with amusement, or buried himself in work for long periods at a time; but always when he opened his eyes again it was the brooch he saw. That had never happened before—that he had opened his eyes again and seen no new angle in a case. It was borne in on him that either he was obsessed or he had reached the last angle in the case—the vital one—and that it told him nothing; it was there for him to read, and he did not know how to.

Suppose, he would think, just suppose that the murder was an emissary's work after all, and not the result of the quarrel in the queue, what type of person would an emissary be? Not one of those nearest the murdered man, certainly. But no one else had had access to the queue except the policeman, the doorkeeper, and Lamont. Or had there been another who had made his escape unnoticed? Raoul Legarde had gone, and Lamont had gone, without attracting notice—the one because the queue was self-absorbed, the other because it was absorbed in the murder. Was it possible that there had been still another? He reminded himself how indifferent to their surroundings the various witnesses had proved them-selves to have been. Not one of them had been able to give an adequate account of the people who had stood next them, with the exception of Raoul Legarde, who was more critical because he was a stranger to England, and an English crowd was still an entertainment to him. To the others it had been no entertainment, and they had not bothered about their neighbours; they had had all the self-absorption of Londoners and habitual queue-goers. It was still possible that some one else had got away without being remembered. And if that were so, what chance was there now of his being captured? What possible clue had they?

The brooch, said his other self, the brooch!

On Friday, Lamont was again brought up at Gowbridge Police Court, and his counsel protested, as Grant had foreseen, about the statement that had been taken from Lamont. Grant had expected him to protest as a matter of form, but it was evident that he was protesting from conviction. He had become aware of the use the Crown might make of Lamont's admission that he had resented Sorrell's departure. The magistrate said that he could see no evidence of coercion on the part of the police. The prisoner had been evidently not only willing but anxious to make a statement. But Lamont's counsel pointed out that his client had been in no mental or physical condition to make such an important statement. He was barely recovered from a bad concussion. He was not in a fit state to...

And so the wordy, futile argument went on, and the two people whom it most concerned—Grant and Lamont—sat bored and weary, waiting till the spate of words should cease and they could depart, the one to his cell and the other to his work and his ever-present problem. Miss Dinmont was in the now crowded court again, and this time there was no doubt of her graciousness to Grant. Her interview with her aunt seemed to have had the strange effect of softening her in every way, and Grant, remembering Mrs. Everett, marvelled. It was only on the way back to the Yard that it occurred to him that her aunt's belief in Lamont had bred in her a hope that

had nothing to do with reason or logic, and that it was the hope that had given her that queer unusual charm that was almost radiance. And Grant swore. She might hope that after all Lamont was not guilty, but what would that avail her if he were convicted?

That pearl brooch! What was it saying? Who had had access to the queue? He flung himself into his room and glared out of the window. He would give up the service. He wasn't fit for it. He kept seeing difficulties where others saw none. It was pure proof of incompetence. How Barker must be laughing at him! Well, let him. Barker had about as much imagination as a paving-stone. But then he, Grant, had too much of it for the police force. He would resign. There would be at least two people who would be grateful to him—the two men who hankered most after his job. As for this case, he would think no more of it.

And even as he made the resolution he turned from the window to take the brooch from its drawer yet once again, but was interrupted by the entrance of Barker.

"Well," said his chief, "I hear they're making a fuss about the statement."

"Yes."

"What good do they think that's going to do them?"

"Don't know. Principle, I suppose. And they see a few admissions that we could make use of, I think."

"Oh, well, let them wriggle," Barker said. "They can't wriggle out of the evidence. Statement or no statement, we've got them on toast. Still worrying over the business?"

"No; I've given it up. After this I'm going to believe what I see and know, and not what I feel."

"Splendid!" said Barker. "You keep a rein on your imagination, Grant, and you'll be a great man some day. Once in five years is often enough to have a flair. If you limit it to that, it's likely to be an asset." And he grinned good-naturedly at his subordinate.

A constable appeared in the doorway, and said to Grant, "A lady to see you, sir."

"Who is it?"

"She wouldn't give her name, but she said it was very important."

"All right. Show her in."

Barker made a movement as if to go, but subsided again, and there was silence while the two men waited for the new arrival. Barker was lounging slightly in front of Grant's desk, and Grant was behind it, his left hand caressing the handle of the drawer that sheltered the brooch. Then the door opened, and the constable ushered in the visitor with an official repetition of his announcement, "A lady to see you, sir."

It was the fat woman from the queue.

"Good afternoon, Mrs.—Wallis." Grant recalled her name with an effort; he had not seen her since the inquest. "What can I do for you?"

"Good afternoon, Inspector," she said, in her rampant Cockney. "I came because I think this business has gone far enough. I killed Bert Sorrell, and I'm not going to let any one suffer for it if I can 'elp it."

"You—" said Grant, and stopped, staring at her fat shining face, beady eyes, tight black satin coat, and black satin toque.

Barker glanced at his subordinate and, seeing him utterly at a loss—really, Grant must have a holiday—he took command of the situation. "Sit down, Mrs.—Wallis," he said kindly. "You've been thinking too much about this affair, haven't you?" He brought forward a chair and settled her into it rather as though she had come to consult him about heartburn. "It isn't good to brood over nasty things like murders. What makes you think you killed Sorrell?"

"I don't think," she said rather tartly. "I didn't make any doubt about it, did I? A very good job it was."

"Well, well," said Barker indulgently, "let us say how do we know you did it?"

"How do you know?" she repeated. "What do you mean? You didn't know till now, but now I've told you and you know."

"But, you know, just because you say you've done it is no reason that we should believe you have," Barker said.

"Not believe me!" she said, her voice rising. "Do people usually come and con-fess to murdering people when they didn't?"

"Oh, quite often," said Barker.

She sat in surprised silence, her bright, expressionless dark eyes darting swiftly from one face to the other. Barker raised a comical eyebrow at the still silent Grant, but Grant hardly noticed him. He came from behind the desk as if loosed suddenly from a spell that had held him motionless, and came up to the woman.

"Mrs. Wallis," he said, "will you take off your gloves a moment?"

"Come now, that's a bit more sensible," she said, as she drew off her black cotton gloves. "I know what you're looking for, but it's nearly gone now."

She held out her left hand, gloveless, to him. On the side of her first finger, healed but still visible in the rough skin of her hardworked hand, was the mark of a jagged scar. Grant expelled a long breath, and Barker came over and bent to examine the woman's hand

"But, Mrs. Wallis," he said, "why should you want to kill Sorrell?"

"Never you mind," she said. "I killed 'im, and that's enough."

"I'm afraid it isn't," Barker said. "The fact that you have a small scar on your finger is no proof at all that you had anything to do with Sorrell's death."

"But I tell you I killed 'im!" she said. "Why won't you believe me? I killed 'im with the little knife my 'usband brought home from Spain."

"So you say, but we have no proof that what you say is true."

She stared hostilely at them both. "You'd think you weren't police at all to listen to you," she remarked. "If it weren't for that young man you've got, I'd walk home right now. I never knew such fools. What more do you want when I've confessed?"

"Oh, quite a lot more," Barker said, as Grant was still silent. "For instance, how could you have killed Sorrell when you were in front of him in the queue?"

"I wasn't in front of 'im. I was standing behind 'im all the time till the queue began to move up tight. Then I stuck the knife in and after a little I shoved in front, keepin' close to 'im all the time so he shouldn't fall."

This time Barker dropped his complaisant manner and looked at her keenly. "And what was Sorrell to you that you should stick a knife in him?" he asked.

"Bert Sorrell wasn't anything to me, but he 'ad to be killed and I killed 'im, see? That's all."

"Did you know Sorrell?"

"Yes."

"How long have you known him?"

Something in that question made her hesitate. "Some time," she said.

"Had he wronged you somehow?"

But her tight mouth shut still more tightly. Barker looked at her rather helplessly, and then Grant could see him turning on the other tack.

"Well, I'm very sorry, Mrs. Wallis," he said, as if the interview were ended, "but we can't put any belief in your story. It has all the appearance of a cock-and-bull yarn. You've been thinking too much about the affair. People do that, you know, quite often, and then they begin to imagine that they did the thing themselves. The best thing you can do is to go home and think no more about it."

As Barker had expected, that got her. A faint alarm appeared on her red face. Then her shrewd black eyes went to Grant and examined him. "I don't know who you may be," she said to Barker, "but Inspector Grant believes me all right."

"This is Superintendent Barker," Grant said, "and my chief. You'll have to tell the superintendent a lot more than that, Mrs. Wallis, before he can believe you."

She recognized the rebuff, and before she had recovered Barker said again, "Why did you kill Sorrell? Unless you give us an adequate reason, I'm afraid we can't believe you. There's nothing at all to connect you with the murder except that little scar. I expect it's that little scar that has set you thinking about all this, isn't it, now?"

"Not it!" she said. "D'you think I'm crazy? Well, I'm not. I did it all right, and I've told you how I did it exactly. Isn't that enough?"

"Oh, no, you could quite easily have made up the tale of how you did it. We've got to have *proof*."

"Well, I've got the sheath of the knife at home," she said in sudden triumph. "There's your proof for you."

"I'm afraid that's no good either," Barker said, with a very good imitation of regret. "Any one could have the sheath of the knife. You'll have to give a reason for killing Sorrell before we'll even begin to believe you."

"Well," she said sullenly after a long silence, "if you must 'ave it, I killed 'im because 'e was going to shoot my Rosie."

"Who is Rosie?"

"My daughter."

"Why should he shoot your daughter?"

"Because she wouldn't have anything to do with the likes of 'im."

"Does your daughter live with you?"

"No."

"Then perhaps you'll let me have her address."

"No; you can't have 'er address. She's gone abroad."

"But if she has gone abroad, how could Sorrell be able to harm her?"

"She hadn't gone abroad when I killed Bert Sorrell."

"Then—" began Barker. But Grant interrupted him.

"Mrs. Wallis," he said slowly, "is Ray Marcable your daughter?"

The woman was on her feet with a swiftness amazing in a person of her bulk. Her tight mouth was suddenly slack, and inarticulate sounds came from her throat.

"Sit down," said Grant gently, and pushed her back into her chair—"sit down and tell us all about it. Take your time."

"'Ow did you know?" she asked, when she had recovered herself. "'Ow could you know?"

Grant ignored the question. "What made you think that Sorrell intended harm to your daughter?"

"Because I met 'im one day in the street. I 'adn't seen 'im for years, and I said some-thing about Rosie going to America. And 'e said, 'So am I.' And I didn't like that, be-cause I knew 'e was a nuisance to Rosie. And then 'e smiled kind of queer at me and said, 'At least, it isn't certain. Either we're both going or neither of us is going.' An' I said, 'What do you mean? Rosie's going for sure. She's got a contract and she can't break it.' And he said, 'She has a previous contract with me. Do you think she'll keep to that too?' And I said not to be foolish. Boy-and-girl affairs were best forgotten, I said. And 'e just smiled again, that horrid queer way, and said, 'Well, wherever she's goin' we're goin' together.' And 'e went away."

"When was that?" Grant asked.

"It was three weeks today—the Friday before I killed 'im."

The day after Sorrell had received the little parcel at Mrs. Everett's. "All right. Go on.

"Well, I went 'ome and thought about it. I kept seeing 'is face. It had a bad grey kind of look in spite of its bein' so pleasant and all that. And I began to be sure that he meant to do Rosie in."

"Had your daughter been engaged to him?"

"Well, 'e said so. It was a boy-and-girl affair. They'd known each other ever since they were kids. Of course, Rosie wouldn't dream of marrying 'im now."

"All right. Go on."

"Well, I thought the only place 'e would be able to see 'er would be the theatre. You see, I went round specially to tell Rosie about it —I didn't see 'er very often—but she didn't seem to worry. She just said. 'Oh, Bert always talked through his hat anyway, and anyhow I don't see him any more.' She 'ad such a lot of other things to think of, she wasn't worried. But I was, I tell you. I went that night and stood on the opposite side of the street, watching the people coming to the queues. But 'e didn't come. And I went to the matinee on Saturday and again in the evening, but 'e didn't come. And again on Monday night, and on Tuesday afternoon. And then on Tuesday night I saw 'im come alone, and I went and stood behind 'im in the queue at the pit door. After a while I saw a bulge in 'is right-'and

coat pocket, and I felt it and it was hard. I was sure then that it was a revolver and that he was going to do Rosie in. So I just waited till the queue moved tight, like I said, and stuck the knife in 'im. He didn't make a sound. You'd think he didn't know anything had happened. And then I shoved in front, like I told you."

"Was Sorrell alone?"

"Yes."

"Who was standing alongside him?"

"For a while there was a dark young gentleman, very good-looking. And then an-other man came to talk to Bert, and pushed the young gentleman back next me."

"And who was behind you?"

"The lady and gentleman who gave evidence at the inquest."

"How is Rosie Markham your daughter?"

"Well, you see, my 'usband was a sailor—that's 'ow I got the knife from Spain—brought me lots of things, 'e did. But when Rosie was little, 'e got drowned; and 'is sister, who was very well married to Markham, offered to take 'er and bring 'er up as their own, 'cause they had no kids. So I let 'er go. And they brought 'er up proper, I'll say that for them. A real lady, my Rosie is. I went out charring for years, but since Rosie got money she bought what they call an annuity for me, and I live on that mostly now."

"How did your daughter know Sorrell?"

"The aunt that brought Bert up used to live next door to the Markhams, and Bert and Rosie went to the same school. They were very friendly then, of course. Then the aunt died when Bert was at the War."

"But it was after the War that they got engaged, surely?"

"They weren't what you would call engaged. They just had a notion for each other. Rosie was on tour in *The Green Sunshade* then, and they used to see each other when she was in town or near it."

"But Sorrell considered himself engaged?"

"Perhaps. Lots of men would like to be engaged to Rosie. As if Rosie would think of the likes of him!"

"But they kept up some kind of acquaintance?"

"Oh, yes, she let 'im come to see 'er at 'er flat sometimes, but she wouldn't go out with him, or anything like that. And she didn't 'ave 'im very often. I don't think she 'ad the heart to send him away for good, you see. She was letting 'im down gently, I think. But I'm not sure about all that, you know. I didn't go to see Rosie often myself. Not that she wasn't nice to me, but it wasn't fair on 'er. She didn't want a common old woman like me round, and 'er hobnobbin' with lords and things."

"Why did you not tell the police at once that Sorrell was threatening your daughter?"

"I thought about it, and then I thought, in the first place, I 'adn't any proof. Judging by the way you treated me today, I should think I was right. And in the second place, even supposing the police shut 'im up, they couldn't shut 'im up for good. He would just do 'er in when he came out. And I couldn't be always round watching 'im. So I thought it best to do it when I could. I 'ad that little knife, and I thought that would be a good way. I don't know anything about pistols and things."

"Tell me, Mrs. Wallis, did your daughter ever see that dagger?"

"No."

"Are you quite sure? Think a little."

"Yes; she did. I'm telling you a lie. When she was quite big, before she left school, they had a play of Shakespeare that had a dagger in it. I don't remember the name of it."

"Macbeth?" suggested Grant.

"Yes; that was it. And she was the heroine. She was always wonderful at acting, you know. Even when she was a little thing she was a fairy in a school pantomime. And I always went to see 'er. And when they were playing that thing *Macbeth*, I gave 'er a loan of the little dagger 'er father 'ad brought from Spain. Just for luck, you know. She gave it back to me when the play was over. But she kept the luck, all right. All 'er life she's been lucky. It was just luck that made Ladds see 'er when she was on tour, so that 'e told Barron about 'er, and Barron gave 'er an interview. That's 'ow she got 'er name—Ray Marcable. All the time she was dancing and singing and what not for him 'e kept saying, 'Remarkable!' and so Rosie took that for 'er name. It's the same initials as 'er own—at least, as 'er adopted name, see?"

There was a silence. Both Barker, who had been wordless for some time, and Grant seemed to be temporarily at a loss. Only the fat woman with the red face seemed to be completely at her ease.

"There's one thing you must remember," she said. "Rosie's name must be kept out of this. Not a word about Rosie. You can say that I killed 'im because of 'im threatening my daughter, who is abroad."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Wallis, I can't hold out any hope of that. Miss Marcable's name is sure to come out."

"But it mustn't!" she said. "It mustn't! It'll spoil it all if she's dragged into it. Think of the scandal and the talk. Surely you gentlemen are clever enough to think of a way of avoiding that?"

"I'm afraid not, Mrs. Wallis. We would if we could, but it won't be possible if your story is true."

"Oh, well," she said, with surprising equanimity, considering her former vehemence, "I don't suppose it will make such a very great difference to Rosie. Rosie is the greatest actress in Britain at the present time, and 'er position is too good for any-thing like that to spoil it. Only you must hang me before she comes back from America."

"It is a little too soon to talk of hanging," Barker said, with a faint smile. "Have you got the key of your house with you?"

"Yes; why?"

"If you hand it over to me, I'll send a man down to verify your story of the sheath of the knife. Where can he find it?"

"It's at the very bottom of the top left-hand drawer of the chest of drawers, in a box that had a scent-bottle in."

Barker called in a man, and gave him the key and the instructions. "And see you leave everything as you get it," Mrs. Wallis said tartly to the emissary.

When the man had gone, Grant pushed a piece of paper across his desk to her and ex-tended a pen. "Will you write your name and

address there?" he said.

She took the pen in her left hand, and rather laboriously wrote what he had asked.

"You remember when I went to see you before the inquest?"

"Yes."

"You weren't left-handed then."

"I can use either hand for most things. There's a name for it, but I forget what it is. But when I'm doing anything very special, I use my left. Rosie, she's left-handed too. And so was my father."

"Why didn't you come before and tell us this story?" Barker asked.

"I didn't think you would get any one unless you got me. But when I saw in the paper that the police had a good case, and all that, I thought something would have to be done. And then today I went to the court to have a look at 'im." So she had been in that crowded court today without Grant having seen her! "'E didn't look bad even if he was foreign-looking. And 'e looked very ill. So I just went 'ome and cleared up and come along."

"I see," said Grant, and raised his eye-brows at his chief. The superintendent summoned a man, and said, "Mrs. Wallis will wait in the next room for the moment, and you will keep her company. If there is anything you want, just ask Simpson for it, Mrs. Wallis." And the door closed behind her tight black satin figure.

18—Conclusion

"Well," said Barker, after a moment's silence, "I'll never talk to you about your flair again, Grant. Do you think she's mad?"

"If logic carried to excess is madness, then she is," Grant said.

"But she seems to have no feelings on the subject at all—either for herself or for Sorrell."

"No. Perhaps she is crazy."

"There's no chance of its not being true? It's a far less believable story in my eyes than the Lamont one."

"Oh, yes, it's true," Grant said. "There's not a doubt of it. It seems strange to you only because you haven't lived with the case as I have. The whole thing falls into place now—Sorrell's suicide, the gift of the money to Lamont, the booking of the pas-sage, the brooch. I was a fool not to have seen that the initials might as well have been R. M. But I was obsessed by the Ratcliffe women at the time. Not that reading the initials the other way would have helped me too much, if Mrs. Wallis hadn't turned up with her confession. Still, I ought to have connected it with Ray Marcable. On the very first day of the investigations, I went down to the Woffington to have a talk with the doorkeeper, and I saw Ray Marcable then, and she gave me tea. Over tea I de-scribed the dagger to her-the description was going to the Press that evening. She looked so startled that I was almost certain that she had seen something like that before. But there wasn't any way of making her tell if she didn't want to, so I left it, and from beginning to end of the case there has been nothing to connect her with it until now. Sorrell must have intended to go to America as soon as he knew that she was going. Poor devil! She might be Ray Marcable to the rest of the world, and a very big star, but he never got over thinking of her as Rosie Markham. That was his tragedy. She, of course, isn't a bit like that. It's a long time since Ray Marcable thought of herself as Rosie Markham. I expect she made it definite that there was nothing doing when she returned the brooch he had had made for her. A brooch like that wouldn't have meant anything to Ray Marcable. He had really meant to go to America till the Thursday evening, when he got the parcel Mrs. Everett talked about. That was the brooch, and that evidently tore it. She may have announced her intention of marrying Lacing, for all I know. You saw that he had gone out on the same boat with her? Sorrell must have made up his mind then that he would shoot her and commit suicide. The Woffington pit isn't the best place for shots at the stage with a revolver, but I expect he counted on the fuss there would be at the end. It isn't so very long since I saw half the pit in the orchestra at the end of a last night at the Arena. Or perhaps he meant to do it as she was leaving the theatre after the show. I don't know. He could have done it in the afternoon quite easily—he and Lamont went to the stalls—but he didn't. I don't think he wanted his friends to know if there was the remotest chance that they mightn't. You see, he tried to fit things so that they would take it for granted that he was on his way to America. That explains the lack of clues. Neither Mrs. Everett nor Lamont would connect the suicide of an unknown man who had killed Ray Marcable with the man they thought was on the Queen of Arabia. He probably forgot that meeting in the street with Mrs. Wallis, or didn't think that his secret thoughts had been so obvious to her. When you come to think of it, it was rather cute of her to spot what he intended. Of course, she had the clue—she knew about Ray. But she was the only one who would be able to connect him with Ray Marcable. Ray Marcable never went anywhere with him, of course. He tried to do the best he could for his friend by handing over his wad, with instructions, as Lamont said, that it wasn't to be opened till the Thursday. Do you think Sorrell thought there was a chance that his friend would never know what had become of him, or do you think he didn't care so long as the deed was well over before they found out?"

"Search me!" said Barker. "I don't think he was too sane either."

"No," said Grant, considering, "I don't think Sorrell was crazy. It's just what Lamont said about him—he thought for a long time about something, and then did exactly what he intended. The only thing he didn't reckon with was Mrs. Wallis—and you'll admit she isn't the kind of quantity you'd expect to find butting around in an ordinary crowd. He couldn't have been a bad sort, Sorrel. Even to the last he kept up the jape about going to America. His packing was perfect—but Lamont was packing at the same time, and probably in and out of the room all the time. He hadn't a single letter or photograph of Ray Marcable. He must have made a clean sweep when he made up his mind what he was going to do. Only, he forgot the brooch. It fell out of a pocket, as I told you."

"Do you think Ray Marcable suspected the truth?"

"No; I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"Because Ray Marcable is one of the most self-absorbed people in this era. In any case, she remembered the dagger from my description of it, but she had no reason to connect the man who was murdered with Sorrell, and therefore wouldn't connect her mother with the affair at all. The Yard didn't know Sorrell's identity until Monday, and that was the day she left for the States. I shall be very much surprised if she knows, even yet, that the dead man was Sorrell. I shouldn't think she reads much in the Press but the gossip column, and America isn't interested in the queue murder."

"Then there's a shock in store for her," said Barker sorrowfully.

"There is," said Grant grimly. "And at least there is a pleasant one in store for Lamont, and I'm glad of it. I have made a complete fool of myself over this case, but I'm happier just now than I have been since I hauled him into the boat from the loch."

"You're a marvel, Grant. With a case like that I should have been as pleased as Punch and all over myself. It isn't canny. If you're ever fired from the force, you can set up as something in the second-sight line at five bob a time."

"So that you can descend on me for blackmail, I suppose? 'Give us a quid or you'll have the cops in!' No; there isn't anything uncanny about it. After all, in any human relationship you've got to decide for your-self, apart from evidence, what a man is like. And though I wouldn't confess it even to myself, I think I knew Lamont was telling the truth that night when he gave me his statement in the train."

"Well, it's a queer business," said Barker, "—the queerest business I've known for ages." He hoisted himself off the desk against which he had been propped. "Let me know when Mullins comes back, will you? If he has the sheath, then we'll decide to accept the story. Lamont's being brought up again tomorrow, isn't he? We can bring her into court then." And he left Grant alone.

And Grant mechanically did what he had been going to do when Barker's entrance interrupted him. He unlocked the drawer of his

desk and took out the dagger and the brooch. Only a little space between the intention and the act, and what a difference! He had been going to withdraw them as the emblems of his despair—mysteries that maddened him; and now he knew all about it. And it was so simple now that he knew. Now that he knew! But if Mrs. Wallis had not come...He turned away from the thought. But for the accident that made the woman fair-minded even in her madness he would have stifled his misgivings and gone through with the case as befitted a valued inspector of the C.I.D., and in accordance with the evidence. He had been saved from that.

It had been so clear a case where evidence was concerned—the quarrel, the left-handedness, the scar. They had searched for the man who had quarrelled with Sorrell, and he was left-handed and had a scar on his thumb. Wasn't that good enough? And now it was nonsense—like Miss Dinmont's bedcover. The murderer was a woman, ambidextrous, with a scar on her finger. He had been saved by the skin of his teeth and a woman's fair dealing.

His thoughts went back over the trail that had led them so far wrong: the hunt for Sorrell's identity; Nottingham, the youth in Faith Brothers', Mr. Yeudall, the waitress at the hotel, all of them remembering the thing they were most interested in, and humanly connecting it with all that happened. Raoul Legarde with his beauty, his quick intelligence, and his complete description of Lamont. Danny Miller. The last night of *Didn't You Know?* Struwwelpeter and the raid on Sorrell's offices. Lacey, the jockey, and that damp day at Lingfield. Mrs. Everett. The burst to the north. Carninnish—the silent Drysdale and the tea at the manse. Miss Dinmont with her logic and her self-containedness. The beginning of his doubt and its blossoming with Lamont's statement. The brooch. And now—

They lay on his desk, the two shining things. The dagger winked knowingly in the evening light, and the pearls gleamed with a still small smile very like the smile that Ray Marcable had made famous. He did not think that Gallio & Stein had made a very good job of the monogram; even yet, looked at casually, he would read it M. R. Both. Mrs. Ratcliffe and Mrs. Everett had read it that way, he remembered.

His thoughts went back to Mrs. Wallis. Was she technically sane? He would have said not; but sanity, from a medical point of view, depended on such queer qualifications. It was impossible to anticipate what a specialist would think of her. And anyhow it wasn't his business. His business was done. The Press would be scathing, of course, about the police haste to make an arrest, but his withers would be unwrung. The Yard would understand, and his professional standing would not suffer. And presently he would have that holiday. He would go down to Stockbridge and fish. Or should he go back to Carninnish? Drysdale had given him a very warm invitation, and the Finley would be teeming with salmon just now. But somehow the thought of that swift brown water and that dark country was ungrateful at the moment. It spoke of turmoil and grief and frustration; and he wanted none of that. He wanted a cowlike placidity, and ease, and pleasant skies. He would go down to Hampshire. It would be green there now, and when he grew tired of the placid Test waters there would be a horse and the turf on Danebury.

Mullins knocked, and came in and laid the sheath of the knife on Grant's desk. "Got it where she said, sir. That's the key of the house."

"Thanks, Mullins," said Grant. He dropped the knife into its sheath, and rose to take it to Barker. Yes; he would go to Hampshire. But sometime, of course, he would go back to Carninnish.

The doctors pronounced Mrs. Wallis quite sane and fit to plead, and her trial is due at the Old Bailey this month. Grant is convinced that she will get off, and I am inclined to trust Grant's flair so far. Unwritten laws, he says, are not supposed to be valid in this country, but a British jury is in reality just as sentimental as a French one; and when they hear the story as put forward by Mrs. Wallis's counsel —one of the most famous criminal defenders of the day—they'll weep bucketfuls and refuse to convict her.

"Well," I said to him, "it has been a queer case, but the queerest thing about it is that there isn't a villain in it."

"Isn't there!" Grant said, with that twist to his mouth.

Well, is there?

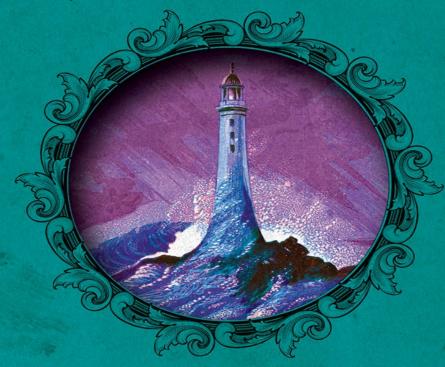
THE END

"RICHLY REWARDING . . . A JOY ABSOLUTE." - The New York Times

JOSEPHINE TEY

ASHILLING

FOR



CANDLES

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT BARNARD

It was a little after seven on a summer morning, and William Potticary was taking his accustomed way over the short down grass of the cliff-top. Beyond his elbow, two hundred feet below, lay the Channel, very still and shining, like a milky opal. All around him hung the bright air, empty as yet of larks. In all the sunlit world no sound except for the screaming of some seagulls on the distant beach; no human activity except for the small lonely figure of Potticary himself, square and dark and uncompromising. A million dewdrops sparkling on the virgin grass suggested a world new—come from its Creator's hand. Not to Potticary, of course. What the dew suggested to Potticary was that the ground fog of the early hours had not begun to disperse until well after sunrise. His subconscious noted the fact and tucked it away, while his conscious mind debated whether, having raised an appetite for breakfast, he should turn at the Gap and go back to the Coastguard Station, or whether, in view of the fineness of the morning, he should walk into Westover for the morning paper, and so hear about the latest murder two hours earlier than he would otherwise. Of course, what with wireless, the edge was off the morning paper, as you might say. But it was an objective. War or peace, a man had to have an objective. You couldn't go into Westover just to look at the front. And going back to breakfast with the paper under your arm made you feel fine, somehow. Yes, perhaps he would walk into the town.

The pace of his black, square-toed boots quickened slightly, their shining surface winking in the sunlight. Proper service, these boots were. One might have thought that Potticary, having spent his best years in brushing his boots to order, would have asserted his individuality, or expressed his personality, or otherwise shaken the dust of a meaningless discipline off his feet by leaving the dust on his boots. But no, Potticary, poor fool, brushed his boots for love of it. He probably had a slave mentality, but had never read enough for it to worry him. As for expressing one's personality, if you described the symptoms to him he would, of course, recognize them. But not by name. In the Service they call that "contrariness."

A seagull flashed suddenly above the cliff-top, and dropped screaming from sight to join its wheeling comrades below. A dreadful row these gulls were making. Potticary moved over to the cliff edge to see what jetsam the tide, now beginning to ebb, had left for them to quarrel over.

The white line of the gently creaming surf was broken by a patch of verdigris green. A bit of cloth. Baize, or something. Funny it should stay so bright a color after being in the water so—

Potticary's blue eyes widened suddenly, his body becoming strangely still. Then the square black boots began to run. *Thud, thud, thud,* on the thick turf, like a heart beating. The Gap was two hundred yards away, but Potticary's time would not have disgraced a track performer. He clattered down the rough steps hewn in the chalk of the Gap, gasping; indignation welling through his excitement. That was what came of going into cold water before breakfast! Lunacy, so help him. Spoiling other people's breakfasts, too. Schaefer's best, except where ribs broken. Not likely to be ribs broken. Perhaps only a faint after all. Assure the patient in a loud voice that he is safe. Her arms and legs were as brown as the sand. That was why he had thought the green thing a piece of cloth. Lunacy, so help him. Who wanted cold water in the dawn unless they had to swim for it? He'd had to swim for it in his time. In that Red Sea port. Taking in a landing party to help the Arabs. Though why anyone wanted to help the lousy bastards—that was the time to swim. When you had to. Orange juice and thin toast, too. No stamina. Lunacy, so help him

It was difficult going on the beach. The large white pebbles slid maliciously under his feet, and the rare patches of sand, being about tide level, were soft and yielding. But presently he was within the cloud of gulls, enveloped by their beating wings and their wild crying.

There was no need for Schaefer's, nor for any other method. He saw that at a glance. The girl was past all help. And Potticary, who had picked bodies unemotionally from the Red Sea surf, was strangely moved. It was all wrong that someone so young should be lying there when all the world was waking up to a brilliant day; when so much of life lay in front of her. A pretty girl, too, she must have been. Her hair had a dyed look, but the rest of her was all right.

A wave washed over her feet and sucked itself away, derisively, through the scarlet-tipped toes. Potticary, although the tide in another minute would be yards away, pulled the inanimate heap a little higher up the beach, beyond reach of the sea's impudence.

Then his mind turned to telephones. He looked around for some garment which the girl might have left behind when she went in to swim. But there seemed to be nothing. Perhaps she had left whatever she was wearing below high-water level and the tide had taken it. Or perhaps it wasn't here that she had gone into the water. Anyhow, there was nothing now with which to cover her body, and Potticary turned away and began his hurried plodding along the beach again, and so back to the Coastguard Station and the nearest telephone.

"Body on the beach," he said to Bill Gunter as he took the receiver from the hook and called the police.

Bill clicked his tongue against his front teeth, and jerked his head back. A gesture which expressed with eloquence and economy the tiresomeness of circumstances, the unreasonableness of human beings who get themselves drowned, and his own satisfaction in expecting the worst of life and being right. "If they want to commit suicide," he said in his subterranean voice, "why do they have to pick on us? Isn't there the whole of the south coast?"

"Not a suicide," Potticary gasped in the intervals of hulloing.

Bill took no notice of him. "Just because the fare to the south coast is more than to here! You'd think when a fellow was tired

of life he'd stop being mean about the fare and bump himself off in style. But no! They take the cheapest ticket they can get and strew themselves over our doorstep!"

"Beachy Head get a lot," gasped the fair-minded Potticary. "Not a suicide, anyhow."

"Course it's a suicide. What do we have cliffs for? Bulwark of England? No. Just as a convenience to suicides. That makes four this year. And there'll be more when they get their income tax demands."

He paused, his ear caught by what Potticary was saying.

"—a girl. Well, a woman. In a bright green bathing dress." (Potticary belonged to a generation which did not know swimsuits.) "Just south of the Gap. 'Bout a hundred yards. No, no one there. I had to come away to telephone. But I'm going back right away. Yes, I'll meet you there. Oh, hullo, Sergeant, is that you? Yes, not the best beginning of a day, but we're getting used to it. Oh, no, just a bathing fatality. Ambulance? Oh, yes, you can bring it practically to the Gap. The track goes off the main Westover road just past the third milestone, and finishes in those trees just inland from the Gap. All right, I'll be seeing you."

"How can you tell it's just a bathing fatality," Bill said.

"She had a bathing dress on, didn't you hear?"

"Nothing to hinder her putting on a bathing dress to throw herself into the water. Make it look like accident."

"You can't throw yourself into the water this time of year. You land on the beach. And there isn't any doubt what you've done."

"Might have walked into the water till she drowned," said Bill, who was a last-ditcher by nature.

"Ye? Might have died of an overdose of bull's-eyes," said Potticary, who approved of last-ditchery in Arabia but found it boring to live with.

They stood around the body in a solemn little group: Potticary, Bill, the sergeant, a constable, and the two ambulance men. The younger ambulance man was worried about his stomach, and the possibility of its disgracing him, but the others had nothing but business in their minds.

"Know her?" the sergeant asked.

"No," said Potticary. "Never seen her before."

None of them had seen her before.

"Can't be from Westover. No one would come out from town with a perfectly good beach at their doors. Must have come from inland somewhere."

"Maybe she went into the water at Westover and was washed up here," the constable suggested.

"Not time for that," Potticary objected. "She hadn't been that long in the water. Must have been drowned hereabouts."

"Then how did she get here?" the sergeant asked.

"By car, of course," Bill said.

"And where is the car now?"

"Where everyone leaves their car: where the track ends at the trees."

"Yes?" said the sergeant. "Well, there's no car there."

The ambulance men agreed with him. They had come up that way with the police—the ambulance was waiting there now—but there was no sign of any other car.

"That's funny," Potticary said. "There's nowhere near enough to be inside walking distance. Not at this time in the morning."

"Shouldn't think she'd walk anyhow," the older ambulance man observed. "Expensive," he added, as they seemed to question him.

They considered the body for a moment in silence. Yes, the ambulance man was right; it was a body expensively cared for.

"And where are her clothes, anyhow?" The sergeant was worried.

Potticary explained his theory about the clothes; that she had left them below high-water mark and that they were now somewhere at sea.

"Yes, that's possible," said the sergeant. "But how did she get here?"

"Funny she should be bathing alone, isn't it?" ventured the young ambulance man, trying out his stomach.

"Nothing's funny, nowadays," Bill rumbled. "It's a wonder she wasn't playing jumping off the cliff with a glider. Swimming on an empty stomach, all alone, is just too ordinary. The young fools make me tired."

"Is that a bracelet around her ankle, or what?" the constable asked.

Yes, it was a bracelet. A chain of platinum links. Curious links, they were. Each one shaped like a C.

"Well," the sergeant straightened himself, "I suppose there's nothing to be done but to remove the body to the mortuary, and then find out who she is. Judging by appearances that shouldn't be difficult. Nothing 'lost, stolen or strayed' about that one."

"No," agreed the ambulance man. "The butler is probably telephoning the station now in great agitation."

"Yes." The sergeant was thoughtful. "I still wonder how she came here, and what—"

His eyes had lifted to the cliff face, and he paused.

"So! We have company!" he said.

They turned to see a man's figure on the cliff-top at the Gap. He was standing in an attitude of intense eagerness, watching them. As they turned towards him he did a swift right-about and disappeared.

"A bit early for strollers," the sergeant said. "And what's he running away for? We'd better have a talk with him."

But before he and the constable had moved more than a pace or two it became evident that the man, far from running away, had been merely making for the entrance to the Gap. His thin dark figure shot now from the mouth of the Gap and came towards them at a shambling run, slipping and stumbling, and giving the little group watching his advent an impression of craziness. They could hear the breath panting through his open mouth as he drew near, although the distance from the Gap was not long and he was young.

He stumbled into their compact circle without looking at them, pushing aside the two policemen who had unconsciously interposed their bulk between him and the body.

"Oh, yes, it is! Oh, it is, it is!" he cried, and without warning sat down and burst into loud tears.

Six flabbergasted men watched him in silence for a moment. Then the sergeant patted him kindly on the back and said, idiotically, "It's all right, son!"

But the young man only rocked himself to and fro and wept the more.

"Come on, come on," rallied the constable, coaxing. (Really, a dreadful exhibition on a nice bright morning.) "That won't do anyone any good, you know. Best pull yourself together—sir," he added, noting the quality of the handkerchief which the young man had produced.

"A relation of yours?" the sergeant inquired, his voice suitably modulated from its former businesslike pitch.

The young man shook his head.

"Oh, just a friend?"

"She was so good to me, so good!"

"Well, at least you'll be able to help us. We were beginning to wonder about her. You can tell us who she is."

"She's my—hostess."

"Yes, but I meant, what is her name?"

"I don't know."

"You—don't—know! Look here, sir, pull yourself together. You're the only one that can help us. You must know the name of the lady you were staying with."

"No, no; I don't."

"What did you call her, then?"

"Chris."

"Chris, what?"

"Just Chris."

"And what did she call you?"

"Robin."
"Is that your name?"

"Yes, my name's Robert Stannaway. No, Tisdall. It used to be Stannaway," he added, catching the sergeant's eye and feeling apparently that explanation was needed.

What the sergeant's eye said was "God give me patience!" What his tongue said was "It all sounds a bit strange to me, Mr.—er—"

"Tisdall."

"Tisdall. Can you tell me how the lady got here this morning?"

"Oh, yes. By car."

"By car, eh? Know what became of the car?"

"Yes. I stole it."

"You what?"

"I stole it. I've just brought it back. It was a swinish thing to do. I felt a cad so I came back. When I found she wasn't anywhere on the road, I thought I'd find her stamping about here. Then I saw you all standing around something—oh dear, oh dear!" He began to rock himself again.

"Where were you staying with this lady?" asked the sergeant, in exceedingly businesslike tones. "In Westover?"

"Oh, no. She has-had, I mean-oh dear!-a cottage. Briars, it's called. Just outside Medley."

"Bout a mile and a half inland," supplemented Potticary, as the sergeant, who was not a native, looked a question.

"Were you alone, or is there a staff there?"

"There's just a woman from the village—Mrs. Pitts—who comes in and cooks."

"I see."

There was a slight pause.

"All right, boys." The sergeant nodded to the ambulance men, and they bent to their work with the stretcher. The young man drew in his breath sharply and once more covered his face with his hands.

"To the mortuary, Sergeant?"

"Yes."

The man's hands came away from his face abruptly.

"Oh, no! Surely not! She had a home. Don't they take people home?"

"We can't take the body of an unknown woman to an uninhabited bungalow."

"It isn't a bungalow," the man automatically corrected. "No. No, I suppose not. But it seems dreadful—the mortuary. Oh, God in heaven above!" he burst out, "why did this have to happen!"

"Davis," the sergeant said to the constable, "you go back with the others and report. I'm going over to—what is it?—Briars? with Mr. Tisdall."

The two ambulance men crunched their heavy way over the pebbles, followed by Potticary and Bill. The noise of their progress had become distant before the sergeant spoke again.

"I suppose it didn't occur to you to go swimming with your hostess?"

A spasm of something like embarrassment ran across Tisdall's face. He hesitated.

"No. I—not much in my line, I'm afraid: swimming before breakfast. I—I've always been a rabbit at games and things like that "

The sergeant nodded, noncommittal. "When did she leave for a swim?"

"I don't know. She told me last night that she was going to the Gap for a swim if she woke early. I woke early myself, but she was gone."

"I see. Well, Mr. Tisdall, if you've recovered I think we'll be getting along."

"Yes. Yes, certainly. I'm all right." He got to his feet and together and in silence they traversed the beach, climbed the steps at the Gap, and came on the car where Tisdall said he had left it: in the shade of the trees where the track ended. It was a beautiful car, if a little too opulent. A cream-colored two-seater with a space between the seats and the hood for parcels, or, at a pinch, for an extra passenger. From this space, the sergeant, exploring, produced a woman's coat and a pair of the sheepskin boots popular with women at winter race-meetings.

"That's what she wore to go down to the beach. Just the coat and boots over her bathing things. There's a towel, too."

There was. The sergeant produced it: a brilliant object in green and orange.

"Funny she didn't take it to the beach with her," he said.

"She liked to dry herself in the sun usually."

"You seem to know a lot about the habits of a lady whose name you didn't know." The sergeant inserted himself into the second seat. "How long have you been living with her?"

"Staying with her," amended Tisdall, his voice for the first time showing an edge. "Get this straight, Sergeant, and it may save you a lot of bother: Chris was my hostess. Not anything else. We stayed in her cottage unchaperoned, but a regiment of servants couldn't have made our relations more correct. Does that strike you as so very peculiar?"

"Very," said the sergeant frankly. "What are these doing here?"

He was peering into a paper bag which held two rather jaded buns.

"Oh, I took these along for her to eat. They were all I could find. We always had a bun when we came out of the water when we were kids. I thought maybe she'd be glad of something."

The car was slipping down the steep track to the main Westover-Stonegate road. They crossed the high road and entered a deep lane on the other side. A signpost said "Medley 1, Liddlestone 3."

"So you had no intention of stealing the car when you set off to follow her to the beach?"

"Certainly not!" Tisdall said, as indignantly as if it made a difference. "It didn't even cross my mind till I came up the hill and saw the car waiting there. Even now I can't believe I really did it. I've been a fool, but I've never done anything like that before."

"Was she in the sea then?"

"I don't know. I didn't go to look. If I had seen her even in the distance I couldn't have done it. I just slung the buns in and beat it. When I came to I was halfway to Canterbury. I just turned her around without stopping, and came straight back."

The sergeant made no comment.

"You still haven't told me how long you've been staying at the cottage?"

"Since Saturday midnight."

It was now Thursday.

"And you still ask me to believe that you don't know your hostess's last name?"

"No. It's a bit queer, I know. I thought so, myself, at first. I had a conventional upbringing. But she made it seem natural. After the first day we simply accepted each other. It was as if I had known her for years." As the sergeant said nothing, but sat radiating doubt as a stove radiates heat, he added with a hint of temper, "Why shouldn't I tell you her name if I knew it!"

"How should I know?" said the sergeant, unhelpfully. He considered out of the corner of his eye the young man's pale, if composed, face. He seemed to have recovered remarkably quickly from his exhibition of nerves and grief. Lightweights, these moderns. No real emotion about anything. Just hysteria. What they called love was just a barnyard exercise; they thought anything else "sentimental." No discipline. No putting up with things. Every time something got difficult, they ran away. Not slapped enough in their youth. All this modern idea about giving children their own way. Look what it led to. Howling on the beach one minute and as cool as a cucumber the next.

And then the sergeant noticed the trembling of the too fine hands on the wheel. No, whatever else Robert Tisdall was he wasn't cool.

"This is the place?" the sergeant asked, as they slowed down by a hedged garden.

"This is the place."

It was a half-timbered cottage of about five rooms; shut in from the road by a seven-foot hedge of briar and honeysuckle, and dripping with roses. A godsend for Americans, weekenders, and photographers. The little windows yawned in the quiet, and the bright blue door stood hospitably open, disclosing in the shadow the gleam of a brass warming pan on the wall. The cottage had been "discovered."

As they walked up the brick path, a thin small woman appeared on the doorstep, brilliant in a white apron; her scanty hair drawn to a knob at the back of her head, and a round bird's-nest affair of black satin set insecurely at the very top of her arched, shining poll.

Tisdall lagged as he caught sight of her, so that the sergeant's large official elevation should announce trouble to her with the clarity of a sandwich board.

But Mrs. Pitts was a policeman's widow, and no apprehension showed on her tight little face. Buttons coming up the path meant for her a meal in demand; her mind acted accordingly.

"I've been making some griddle cakes for breakfast. It's going to be hot later on. Best to let the stove out. Tell Miss Robinson when she comes in, will you, sir?" Then, realizing that buttons were a badge of office, "Don't tell me you've been driving without a license, sir!"

"Miss—Robinson, is it? Has met with an accident," the sergeant said.

"The car! Oh, dear! She was always that reckless with it. Is she bad?"

"It wasn't the car. An accident in the water."

"Oh," she said slowly. "That bad!"

"How do you mean: that bad?"

"Accidents in the water only mean one thing."

"Yes," agreed the sergeant.

"Well, well," she said, sadly contemplative. Then, her manner changing abruptly, "And where were *you?*" she snapped, eyeing the drooping Tisdall as she eyed Saturday-night fish on a Westover fishmonger's slab. Her superficial deference to "gentry" had vanished in the presence of catastrophe. Tisdall appeared as the "bundle of uselessness" she had privately considered him.

The sergeant was interested but snubbing. "The gentleman wasn't there."

"He ought to have been there. He left just after her."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw him. I live in the cottage down the road."

"Do you know Miss Robinson's other address? I take it for granted this isn't her permanent home."

"No, of course it isn't. She only has this place for a month. It belongs to Owen Hughes." She paused, impressively, to let the importance of the name sink in. "But he's doing a film in Hollywood. About a Spanish count, it was to be, so he told me. He said he's done Italian counts and French counts and he thought it would be a new experience for him to be a Spanish count. Very nice, Mr. Hughes is. Not a bit spoiled in spite of all the fuss they make of him. You wouldn't believe it, but a girl came to me once and offered me five pounds if I'd give her the sheets he had slept in. What I gave her was a piece of my mind. But she wasn't a bit ashamed. Offered me twenty-five shillings for a pillow slip. I don't know what the world is coming to, that I don't, what with—"

"What other address had Miss Robinson?"

"I don't know any of her addresses but this one."

"Didn't she write and tell you that she was coming?"

"Write! No! She sent telegrams. I suppose she could write, but I'll take my alfred davy she never did. About six telegrams a day used to go to the post office in Liddlestone. My Albert used to take them, mostly; between school. Some of them used three or four forms, they were that long."

"Do you know any of the people she had down here, then?"

"She didn't have any folks here. 'Cept Mr. Stannaway, that is."

"No one!"

"Not a one. Once—it was when I was showing her the trick of flushing the W.C.; you have to pull hard and then let go smart-like—once she said: 'Do you ever, Mrs. Pitts,' she said, 'get sick of the sight of people's faces?' I said I got a bit tired of some. She said: 'Not some, Mrs. Pitts. All of them. Just sick of people.' I said when I felt like that I took a dose of castor oil. She laughed and said it wasn't a bad idea. Only everyone should have one and what a good new world it would be in two days. 'Mussolini never thought of that one,' she said."

"Was it London she came from?"

"Yes. She went up just once or twice in the three weeks she's been here. Last time was last weekend, when she brought Mr. Stannaway back." Again her glance dismissed Tisdall as something less than human. "Doesn't *he* know her address?" she asked.

"No one does," the sergeant said. "I'll look through her papers and see what I can find."

Mrs. Pitts led the way into the living room; cool, low-beamed, and smelling of sweet peas.

"What have you done with her—with the body, I mean?" she asked.

"At the mortuary."

This seemed to bring home tragedy for the first time.

"Oh, deary me." She moved the end of her apron over a polished table, slowly. "And me making griddle cakes."

This was not a lament for wasted griddle cakes, but her salute to the strangeness of life.

"I expect you'll need breakfast," she said to Tisdall, softened by her unconscious recognition of the fact that the best are but puppets.

But Tisdall wanted no breakfast. He shook his head and turned away to the window, while the sergeant searched in the desk.

"I wouldn't mind one of those griddle cakes," the sergeant said, turning over papers.

"You won't get better in Kent, though it's me that's saying it. And perhaps Mr. Stannaway will swallow some tea."

She went away to the kitchen.

"So you didn't know her name was Robinson?" said the sergeant, glancing up.

"Mrs. Pitts always addressed her as 'miss.' And anyhow, did she look as if her name was Robinson?"

The sergeant, too, did not believe for a moment that her name was Robinson, so he let the subject drop.

Presently Tisdall said: "If you don't need me, I think I'll go into the garden. It—it's stuffy in here."

"All right. You won't forget I need the car to get back to Westover."

"I've told you. It was a sudden impulse. Anyhow, I couldn't very well steal it now and hope to get away with it."

Not so dumb, decided the sergeant. Quite a bit of temper, too. Not just a nonentity, by any means.

The desk was littered with magazines, newspapers, half-finished cartons of cigarettes, bits of a jigsaw puzzle, a nail file and polish, patterns of silk, and a dozen more odds and ends; everything, in fact, except notepaper. The only documents were bills from the local tradesmen, most of them receipted. If the woman had been untidy and unmethodical, she had at least had a streak of caution. The receipts might be crumpled and difficult to find if wanted, but they had never been thrown away.

The sergeant, soothed by the quiet of the early morning, the cheerful sounds of Mrs. Pitts making tea in the kitchen, and the prospect of griddle cakes to come, began as he worked at the desk to indulge in his one vice. He whistled. Very low and round and sweet, the sergeant's whistling was, but, still—whistling. "Sing to Me Sometimes" he warbled, not forgetting the grace notes, and his subconscious derived great satisfaction from the performance. His wife had once shown him a bit in the *Mail* that said that whistling was the sign of an empty mind. But it hadn't cured him.

And then, abruptly, the even tenor of the moment was shattered. Without warning there came a mock tattoo on the half-open sitting-room door—*tum-te-ta-tum-tumta-TA!* A man's voice said, "So this is where you're hiding out!" The door was flung wide with a flourish and in the opening stood a short dark stranger.

"We-e-ell," he said, making several syllables of it. He stood staring at the sergeant, amused and smiling broadly. "I thought you were Chris! What is the Force doing here? Been a burglary?"

"No, no burglary." The sergeant was trying to collect his thoughts.

"Don't tell me Chris has been throwing a wild party! I thought she gave that up years ago. They don't go with all those high-brow roles."

"No, as a matter of fact, there's-"

"Where is she, anyway?" He raised his voice in a cheerful shout directed at the upper story. "Yo-hoo! Chris. Come on down, you old so-and-so! Hiding out on me!" To the sergeant: "Gave us all the slip for nearly three weeks now. Too much Kleig, I guess. Gives them all the jitters sooner or later. But then, the last one was such a success they naturally want to cash in on it." He hummed a bar of "Sing to Me Sometimes," with mock solemnity. "That's why I thought you were Chris; you were whistling her song. Whistling darned good, too."

"Her—her song?" Presently, the sergeant hoped, a gleam of light would be vouchsafed him.
"Yes, her song. Who else's? You didn't think it was mine, my dear good chap, did you? Not on your life. I wrote the thing, sure. But that doesn't count. It's her song. And perhaps she didn't put it across! Eh? Wasn't that a performance?"

"I couldn't really say." If the man would stop talking, he might sort things out.

"Perhaps you haven't seen Bars of Iron yet?"

"No, I can't say I have."

"That's the worst of wireless and gramophone records and what not: they take all the pep out of a film. Probably by the time you hear Chris sing that song you'll be so sick of the sound of it that you'll retch at the ad lib. It's not fair to a film. All right for songwriters and that sort of cattle, but rough on a film, very rough. There ought to be some sort of agreement. Hey, Chris! Isn't she here, after all my trouble in catching up on her?" His face drooped like a disappointed baby's. "Having her walk in and find me isn't half such a good one as walking in on her. Do you think—

"Just a minute, Mr.—er—I don't know your name."

"I'm Jay Harmer. Jason on the birth certificate. I wrote 'If It Can't Be in June.' You probably whistle that as—"

"Mr. Harmer. Do I understand that the lady who is—was—staying here is a film actress?"

"Is she a film actress!" Slow amazement deprived Mr. Harmer for once of speech. Then it began to dawn on him that he must have made a mistake. "Say, Chris is staying here, isn't she?"

"The lady's name is Chris, yes. But—well, perhaps you'll be able to help us. There's been some trouble—very unfortunate and apparently she said her name was Robinson."

The man laughed in rich amusement. "Robinson! That's a good one. I always said she had no imagination. Couldn't write a gag. Did you believe she was a Robinson?"

'Well, no; it seemed unlikely."

"What did I tell you! Well, just to pay her out for treating me like bits on the cutting-room floor, I'm going to split on her. She'll probably put me in the icebox for twenty-four hours, but it'll be worth it. I'm no gentleman, anyhow, so I won't damage myself in the telling. The lady's name, Sergeant, is Christine Clay."

"Christine Clay!" said the sergeant. His jaw slackened and dropped, quite beyond his control.

"Christine Clay!" breathed Mrs. Pitts, standing in the doorway, a forgotten tray of griddle cakes in her hands.

Christine Clay! Christine Clay!" yelled the midday posters.

"Christine Clay!" screamed the headlines.
"Christine Clay!" chattered the wireless.
"Christine Clay!" said neighbor to neighbor.

All over the world people paused to speak the words. Christine Clay was drowned! And in all civilization only one person said, "Who is Christine Clay?"—a bright young man at a Bloomsbury party. And he was merely being "bright."

All over the world things happened because one woman had lost her life. In California a man telephoned a summons to a girl in Greenwich Village. A Texas airplane pilot did an extra night flight carrying Clay films for rush showing. A New York firm canceled an order. An Italian nobleman went bankrupt: he had hoped to sell her his yacht. A man in Philadelphia ate his first square meal in months, thanks to an "I knew her when" story. A woman in Le Touquet sang because now her chance had come. And in an English cathedral town a man thanked God on his knees.

The Press, becalmed in the doldrums of the silly season, leaped to movement at so unhoped-for a wind. The Clarion recalled Bart Bartholomew, their "descriptive" man, from a beauty contest in Brighton (much to Bart's thankfulness-he came back loudly wondering how butchers ate meat), and "Jammy" Hopkins, their "crime and passion" star, from a very dull and low-class poker killing in Bradford. (So far had the Clarion sunk.) News photographers deserted motor race tracks, reviews, society weddings, cricket, and the man who was going to Mars in a balloon, and swarmed like beetles over the cottage in Kent, the maisonette in South Street, and the furnished manor in Hampshire. That, having rented so charming a country retreat as this last, Christine Clay had yet run away to an unknown and inconvenient cottage without the knowledge of her friends made a very pleasant appendage to the main sensation of her death. Photographs of the manor (garden front, because of the yews) appeared labeled "The place Christine Clay owned" (she had only rented it for the season, but there was no emotion in renting a place); and next to these impressive pictures were placed photographs of the rose-embowered home of the people, with the caption "The place she preferred."

Her press agent shed tears over that. Something like that would break when it was too late.

It might have been observed by any student of nature not too actively engaged in the consequences of it that Christine Clay's death, while it gave rise to pity, dismay, horror, regret, and half a dozen other emotions in varying degrees, yet seemed to move no one to grief. The only outburst of real feeling had been that hysterical crisis of Robert Tisdall's over her body. And who should say how much of that was self-pity? Christine was too international a figure to belong to anything so small as a "set." But among her immediate acquaintances dismay was the most marked reaction of the dreadful news. And not always that. Coyne, who was due to direct her third and final picture in England, might be at the point of despair, but Lejeune (late Tomkins), who had been engaged to play opposite her, was greatly relieved; a picture with Clay might be a feather in your cap but it was a jinx in your box office. The Duchess of Trent, who had arranged a Clay luncheon which was to rehabilitate her as a hostess in the eyes of London, might be gnashing her teeth, but Lydia Keats was openly jubilant. She had prophesied the death, and even for a successful society seer that was a good guess. "Darling, how wonderful of you!" fluttered her friends. "Darling how wonderful of you!" On and on. Until Lydia so lost her head with delight that she spent all her days going from one gathering to another so that she might make that delicious entrance all over again, hear them say: "Here's Lydia! Darling how-" and bask in the radiance of their wonder. No, as far as anyone could see, no hearts were breaking because Christine Clay was no more. The world dusted off its blacks and hoped for invitations to the funeral.

But first there was the inquest. And it was at the inquest that the first faint stirring of a much greater sensation began to appear. It was Jammy Hopkins who noted the quiver on the smooth surface. He had earned his nickname because of his glad cry of "Jam! Jam!" when a good story broke, and his philosophical reflection when times were thin that "all was jam that came to the rollers." Hopkins had an excellent nose for jam, and so it was that he stopped suddenly in the middle of analyzing for Bartholomew's benefit the various sensation seekers crowding the little Kentish village hall. Stopped dead and stared. Because, between the flyaway hats of two bright sensationalists, he could see a man's calm face which was much more sensational than anything in that building.

"Seen something?" Bart asked.

"Have I seen something!" Hopkins slid from the end of the form, just as the coroner sat down and tapped for silence. "Keep my place," he whispered, and disappeared out of the building. He entered it again at the back door, expertly pushed his way to the place he wanted, and sat down. The man turned his head to view this gate-crasher.

"Morning, Inspector," said Hopkins.

The Inspector looked his disgust.

"I wouldn't do it if I didn't need the money," Hopkins said, vox humana.

The coroner tapped again for silence, but the Inspector's face relaxed.

Presently, under cover of the bustle of Potticary's arrival to give evidence, Hopkins said, "What is Scotland Yard doing here, Inspector?"

"Looking on."

"I see. Just studying inquests as an institution. Crime slack these days?" As the Inspector showed no sign of being drawn: "Oh, have a heart, Inspector. What's in the wind? Is there something phony about the death? Suspicions, eh? If you don't want to talk for publication I'm the original locked casket."

"You're the original camel fly."

"Oh, well, look at the hides I have to get through!" This produced a grin and nothing else. "Look here. Just tell me one thing, Inspector. Is this inquest going to be adjourned?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"Thank you. That tells me everything," Hopkins said, half sarcastic, half serious, as he made his way out again. He prised Mrs. Pitts's Albert away from the wall where he clung limpetlike by the window, persuaded him that two shillings were better than a partial view of dull proceedings, and sent him to Liddlestone with a telegram which set the *Clarion* office buzzing. Then he went back to Bart.

"Something wrong," he said out of the corner of his mouth in answer to Bart's eyebrows. "The Yard's here. That's Grant, behind the scarlet hat. Inquest going to be adjourned. Spot the murderer!"

"Not here," Bart said, having considered the gathering.

"No," agreed Jammy. "Who's the chap in the flannel bags?"

"Boyfriend."

"Thought the boyfriend was Jay Harmer."

"Was. This one newer."

" 'Love nest killing'?"

"Wouldn't mind betting."

"Supposed to be cold, I thought?"

"Yes. So they say. Fooled them, seemingly. Good enough reason for murder, I should think."

The evidence was of the most formal kind—the finding and identification of the body—and as soon as that had been offered the coroner brought the proceedings to an end, and fixed no date for resumption.

Hopkins had decided that, the Clay death being apparently no accident, and Scotland Yard not being able so far to make any arrest, the person to cultivate was undoubtedly the man in the flannel bags. Tisdall, his name was. Bart said that every newspaper man in England had tried to interview him the previous day (Hopkins being then en route from the poker murder) but that he had been exceptionally tough. Called them ghouls, and vultures, and rats, and other things less easy of specification, and had altogether seemed unaware of the standing of the Press. No one was rude to the Press anymore—not with impunity, that was.

But Hopkins had great faith in his power to seduce the human mind.

"Your name Tisdall, by any chance?" he asked casually, "finding" himself alongside the young man in the crowded procession to the door.

The man's face hardened into instant enmity.

"Yes, it is," he said aggressively.

"Not old Tom Tisdall's nephew?"

The face cleared swiftly.

"Yes. Did you know Uncle Tom?"

"A little," admitted Hopkins, no whit dismayed to find that there really was a Tom Tisdall.

"You seem to know about my giving up the Stannaway?"

"Yes, someone told me," Hopkins said, wondering if the Stannaway was a house, or what? "What are you doing now?"

By the time they had reached the door, Hopkins had established himself. "Can I give you a lift somewhere? Come and have lunch with me?"

A pip! In half an hour he'd have a front-page story. And this was the baby they said was difficult! No, there was no doubt of it: he, James Brooke Hopkins, was the greatest newspaper man in the business.

"Sorry, Mr. Hopkins," said Grant's pleasant voice at his shoulder. "I don't want to spoil your party, but Mr. Tisdall has an appointment with me." And, since Tisdall betrayed his astonishment and Hopkins his instant putting two and two together, he added, "We're hoping he can help us."

"I don't understand," Tisdall was beginning. And Hopkins, seeing that Tisdall was unaware of Grant's identity, rushed in with glad maliciousness.

"That is Scotland Yard," he said. "Inspector Grant. Never had an unsolved crime to his name."

"I hope you write my obituary," Grant said.

"I hope I do!" the journalist said, with fervor.

And then they noticed Tisdall. His face was like parchment, dry and old and expressionless. Only the pulse beating hard at his temple suggested a living being. Journalist and detective stood looking in mutual astonishment at so unexpected a result of Hopkins's announcement. And then, seeing the man's knees beginning to sag, Grant took him hastily by the arm.

"Here! Come and sit down. My car is just here."

He edged the apparently blind Tisdall through the dawdling, chattering crowd, and pushed him into the rear seat of a dark touring car.

"Westover," he said to the chauffeur, and got in beside Tisdall.

As they went at snail's pace towards the high road, Grant saw Hopkins still standing where they had left him. That Jammy Hopkins should stay without moving for more than three consecutive minutes argued that he was being given furiously to think. From now on—the Inspector sighed—the camel fly would be a bloodhound.

And the Inspector, too, had food for his wits. He had been called in the previous night by a worried County Constabulary who had no desire to make themselves ridiculous by making mountains out of molehills, but who found themselves unable to explain away satisfactorily one very small, very puzzling obstacle to their path. They had all viewed the obstacle, from the Chief Constable down to the sergeant who had taken charge on the beach, had been rude about each other's theories, and had in the end agreed on only one thing: that they wanted to push the responsibility on to someone else's shoulders. It was all very well to hang on to your own crime, and the kudos of a solution, when there was a crime. But to decide in cold blood to announce a crime, on the doubtful evidence of that common little object on the table; to risk, not the disgrace of failure, but the much worse slings of ridicule, was something they could not find it in their hearts to do. And so Grant had canceled his seat at the Criterion and had journeyed down to Westover. He had inspected the stumbling block, listened with patience to their theories and with respect to the police surgeon's story, and had gone to bed in the small hours with a great desire to interview Robert Tisdall. And now here was Tisdall, beside him, still speechless and half-fainting because he had been confronted without warning by Scotland Yard. Yes, there was a case; no doubt of it. Well, there couldn't be any questioning with Cork in the driving seat, so until they got back to Westover Tisdall might be left to recover. Grant took a flask from the car pocket and offered it to him. Tisdall took it shakily but made good use of it. Presently he apologized for his weakness.

"I don't know what went wrong. This affair has been an awful shock to me. I haven't been sleeping. Keep going over things in my mind. Or rather, my mind keeps doing it; I can't stop it. And then, at the inquest it seemed—I say, is something not right? I mean, was it not a simple drowning? Why did they postpone the end of the inquest?"

"There are one or two things that the police find puzzling."

"As what, for instance?"

"I think we won't discuss it until we get to Westover."

"Is anything I say to be used in evidence against me?" The smile was wry but the intention was good.

"You took the words out of my mouth," the Inspector said lightly, and silence fell between them.

By the time they reached the Chief Constable's room in the County Police offices, Tisdall was looking normal if a little worn. In fact, so normal did he look that when Grant said, "This is Mr. Tisdall," the Chief Constable, who was a genial soul except when someone jumped in his pocket out hunting, almost shook hands with him, but recollected himself before any harm was done.

"Howdyudo. Harrump!" He cleared his throat to give himself time. Couldn't do that, of course. My goodness, no. Fellow suspected of murder. Didn't look it, no, upon his soul he didn't. But there was no telling these days. The most charming people were—well, things he hadn't known till lately existed. Very sad. But couldn't shake hands, of course. No, definitely not. "Harrump! Fine morning! Bad for racing, of course. Going very hard. But good for the holiday makers. Mustn't be selfish in our pleasures. You a racing man? Going to Goodwood? Oh, well, perhaps—No. Well, I expect you and—and our friend here—" somehow one didn't want to rub in the fact of Grant's inspector-ship. Nice-looking chap. Well brought up, and all that —"would like to talk in peace. I'm going to lunch. The Ship," he added, for Grant's benefit, in case the Inspector wanted him. "Not that the food's very good there, but it's a self-respecting house. Not like these Marine things. Like to get steak and potatoes without going through sun lounges for them." And the Chief Constable took himself out.

"A Freedy Lloyd part," Tisdall said.

Grant looked up appreciatively from pulling forward a chair.

"You're a theater fan."

"I was a fan of most things."

Grant's mind focused on the peculiarity of the phrase. "Why 'was'?" he asked.

"Because I'm broke. You need money to be a fan."

"You won't forget that formula about 'anything you say,' will you?"

"No, thanks. But it doesn't make any difference. I can only tell you the truth. If you draw wrong deductions from it then that's your fault, not mine."

"So it's I who am on trial. A nice point. I appreciate it. Well, try me out. I want to know how you were living in the same house with a woman whose name you didn't know? You did tell the County Police that, didn't you?"

"Yes. I expect it sounds incredible. Silly, too. But it's quite simple. You see, I was standing on the pavement opposite the Gaiety one night, very late, wondering what to do. I had fivepence in my pocket, and that was fivepence too much, because I had aimed at having nothing at all. And I was wondering whether to have a last go at spending the fivepence (there isn't much one can do with fivepence) or to cheat, and forget about the odd pennies. So—"

"Just a moment. You might explain to a dullard just why these five pennies should have been important."

"They were the end of a fortune, you see. Thirty thousand. I inherited it from my uncle. My mother's brother. My real name is Stannaway, but Uncle Tom asked that I should take his name with the money. I didn't mind. The Tisdalls were a much better lot than the Stannaways, anyhow. Stamina and ballast and all that. If I'd been a Tisdall I wouldn't be broke now, but I'm nearly all Stannaway. I've been the perfect fool, the complete Awful Warning. I was in an architect's office when I inherited the money, living in rooms and just making do; and it went to my head to have what seemed more than I could ever spend. I gave up my job and went to see all the places I'd wanted to see and never hoped to. New York and Hollywood and Budapest and Rome and Capri and God knows where else. I came back to London with about two thousand, meaning to bank it and get a job. It would have been easy enough two years before—I mean, to bank the money. I hadn't anyone to help spend it then. But in those two years I had gathered a lot of friends all over the world, and there were never less than a dozen of them in London at the same time. So I woke up one morning to find that I was down to my last hundred. It was a bit of a shock. Like cold water. I sat down and thought for the first time for two years. I had the choice of two things: sponging—you can live in luxury anywhere in the world's capitals for six months if you're a good sponger: I know; I supported dozens of that sort—and disappearing. Disappearing seemed easier. I could drop out quite easily. People would just say, 'Where's Bobby Tisdall these days?' and they'd just take it for granted that I was in some of the other corners of the world where their sort went, and that they'd run into me one of these days. I was supposed to be suffocatingly rich, you see, and it was easier to drop out and leave them thinking of me like that than to stay and be laughed at when the truth began to dawn on them. I paid my bills, and that left me with fifty-seven pounds. I thought I'd have one last gamble then, and see if I could pick up enough to start me off on the new level. So I had thirty pounds-fifteen each way; that's the bit of Tisdall in me-on Red Rowan in the Eclipse. He finished fifth. Twenty-odd pounds isn't enough to start anything except a barrow. There was nothing for it but tramping. I wasn't much put out at the thought of tramping—it would be a change—but you can't tramp with twenty-seven pounds in the bank, so I decided to blue it all in one grand last night. I promised myself that I'd finish up without a penny in my pocket. Then I'd pawn my evening things for some suitable clothes and hit the road. What I hadn't reckoned with was that you can't pawn things in the west-end on a Saturday midnight. And you can't take to the road in evening things without being conspicuous. So I was standing there, as I said, feeling resentful about these five pennies and wondering what I was to do about my clothes and a place to sleep. I was standing by the traffic lights at the Aldwych, just before you turn around into Lancaster Place, when a car was pulled up by the red lights. Chris was in it, alone—'

"Chris?"

"I didn't know her name, then. She looked at me for a little. The street was very quiet. Just us two. And we were so close that it seemed natural when she smiled and said, 'Take you anywhere, mister?' I said: 'Yes. Land's End.' She said: 'A bit off my route. Chatham, Faversham, Canterbury, and points east?' Well, it was one solution. I couldn't go on standing there, and I couldn't think of a water-tight tale that would get me a bed in a friend's house. Besides, I felt far away from all that crowd already. So I got in without thinking much about it. She was charming to me. I didn't tell her all I'm telling you, but she soon found out I was broke to the wide. I began to explain, but she said: 'All right, I don't want to know. Let's accept each other on face value. You're Robin and I'm Chris.' I'd told her my name was Robert Stannaway, and without knowing it she used my family pet name. The crowd called me Bobby. It was sort of comforting to hear someone call me Robin again."

"Why did you say your name was Stannaway?"

"I don't know. A sort of desire to get away from the fortune side of things. I hadn't been much ornament to the name, anyhow. And in my mind I always thought of myself as Stannaway."

"All right. Go on."

"There isn't much more to tell. She offered me hospitality. Told me she was alone, but that—well, that I'd be just a guest. I said wasn't she taking a chance. She said, 'Yes, but I've taken them all my life and it's worked out pretty well, so far.' It seemed an awkward arrangement to me, but it turned out just the opposite. She was right about it. It made things very easy, just accepting each other. In a way (it was queer, but it was like that) it was as if we had known each other for years. If we had had to start at scratch and work up, it would have taken us weeks to get to the same stage. We liked each other a lot. I don't mean sentimentally, although she was stunning to look at; I mean I thought her grand. I had no clothes for the next morning, but I spent that day in a bathing suit and a dressing gown that someone had left. And on Monday Mrs. Pitts came in to my room and said, 'Your suitcase, sir,' and dumped a case I'd never seen before in the middle of the floor. It had a complete new outfit in it—tweed coat and flannels, socks, shirt, everything. From a place in Canterbury. The suitcase was old, and had a label with my name on it. She had even remembered my name. Well, I can't describe to you what I felt about these things. You see, it was the first time for years that anyone had given me anything. With the crowd it was take, take, all the time. 'Bobby'll pay.' 'Bobby'll lend his car.' They never thought of me at all. I don't think they ever stopped to look at me. Anyhow, those clothes sort of broke

me up. I'd have died for her. She laughed when she saw me in them—they were reach-me-downs, of course, but they fitted quite well—and said: 'Not exactly Bruton Street, but they'll do. Don't say I can't size a man up.' So we settled down to having a good time together, just lazing around, reading, talking, swimming, cooking when Mrs. Pitts wasn't there. I put out of my head what was going to happen after. She said that in about ten days she'd have to leave the cottage. I tried to go after the first day, out of politeness, but she wouldn't let me. And after that I didn't try. That's how I came to be staying there, and that's how I didn't know her name." He drew in his breath in a sharp sigh as he sat back. "Now I know how these psychoanalysts make money. It's a long time since I enjoyed anything like telling you all about myself."

Grant smiled involuntarily. There was an engaging childlikeness about the boy.

Then he shook himself mentally, like a dog coming out of water.

Charm. The most insidious weapon in all the human armory. And here it was, being exploited under his nose. He considered the good-natured feckless face dispassionately. He had known at least one murderer who had had that type of good looks; blue-eyed, amiable, harmless; and he had buried his dismembered fiancée in an ash pit. Tisdall's eyes were of that particular warm opaque blue which Grant had noted so often in men to whom the society of women was a necessity of existence. Mother's darlings had those eyes; so sometimes, had womanizers.

Well, presently he would check up on Tisdall. Meanwhile—

"Do you ask me to believe that in your four days together you had no suspicion at all of Miss Clay's identity?" he asked, marking time until he could bring Tisdall unsuspecting to the crucial matter.

"I suspected that she was an actress. Partly from things she said, but mostly because there were such a lot of stage and film magazines in the house. I asked her about it once, but she said: 'No names, no pack drill. It's a good motto, Robin. Don't forget.' "

"I see. Did the outfit Miss Clay bought for you include an overcoat?"

"No. A mackintosh. I had a coat."

"You were wearing a coat over your evening things?"

"Yes. It had been drizzling when we set out for dinner—the crowd and I, I mean."

"And you still have that coat?"

"No. It was stolen from the car one day when we were over at Dymchurch." His eyes grew alarmed suddenly. "Why? What has the coat got to do with it?"

"Was it dark- or light-colored?"

"Dark, of course. A sort of gray-black. Why?"

"Did you report its loss?"

"No, neither of us wanted attention called to us. What has it—"

"Just tell me about Thursday morning, will you?" The face opposite him was steadily losing its ingenuousness and becoming wary and inimical again. "I understand that you didn't go with Miss Clay to swim. Is that right?"

"Yes. But I awoke almost as soon as she had gone—"

"How do you know when she went if you were asleep?"

"Because it was still only six. She couldn't have been gone long. And Mrs. Pitts said afterwards that I had followed down the road on her heels."

"I see. And in the hour and a half—roughly—between your getting up and the finding of Miss Clay's body you walked to the Gap, stole the car, drove it in the direction of Canterbury, regretted what you had done, came back, and found that Miss Clay had been drowned. Is that a complete record of your actions?"

"Vec I think so."

"If you felt so grateful to Miss Clay, it was surely an extraordinary thing to do."

"Extraordinary isn't the word at all. Even yet I can't believe I did it."

"You are quite sure that you didn't enter the water that morning?"

"Of course I'm sure. Why?"

"When was your last swim? Previous to Thursday morning, I mean?"

"Noon on Wednesday."

"And yet your swimming suit was soaking wet on Thursday morning."

"How do you know that! Yes, it was. But not with salt water. It had been spread to dry on the roof below my window, and when I was dressing on Thursday morning I noticed that the birds in the tree—an apple tree hangs over that gable—had made too free with it. So I washed it in the water I had been washing in."

"You didn't put it out to dry again, though, apparently?"

"After what happened the last time? No! I put it on the towel rail. For God's sake, Inspector, tell me what all this has to do with Chris's death? Can't you see that questions you can't see the reason of are torture? I've had about all I can stand. The inquest this morning was the last straw. Everyone describing how they found her. Talking about 'the body,' when all the time it was Chris. Chris! And now all this mystery and suspicion. If there was anything not straightforward about her drowning, what has my coat got to do with it anyway?"

"Because this was found entangled in her hair."

Grant opened a cardboard box on the table and exhibited a black button of the kind used for men's coats. It had been torn from its proper place, the worn threads of its attachment still forming a ragged "neck." And around the neck, close to the button, was twined a thin strand of bright hair.

Tisdall was on his feet, both hands on the table edge, staring down at the object.

"You think someone *drowned* her? I mean—like *that!* But that isn't mine. There are thousands of buttons like that. What makes you think it is mine?"

"I don't think anything, Mr. Tisdall. I am only eliminating possibilities. All I wanted you to do was to account for any garment owned by you which had buttons like that. You say you had one but that it was stolen."

Tisdall stared at the Inspector, his mouth opening and shutting helplessly.

The door breezed open, after the sketchiest of knocks, and in the middle of the floor stood a small, skinny child of sixteen in shabby tweeds, her dark head hatless and very untidy.

"Oh, sorry," she said. "I thought my father was here. Sorry."

Tisdall slumped to the floor with a crash.

Grant, who was sitting on the other side of the large table sprang to action, but the skinny child, with no sign of haste or dismay, was there first.

"Dear me!" she said, getting the slumped body under the shoulders from behind and turning it over.

Grant took a cushion from a chair.

"I shouldn't do that," she said. "You let their heads stay back unless it's apoplexy. And he's a bit young for that, isn't he?"

She was loosening collar and tie and shirt band with the expert detachment of a cook paring pastry from a pie edge. Grant noticed that her sunburnt wrists were covered with small scars and scratches of varying age, and that they stuck too far out of her out-grown sleeves.

"You'll find brandy in the cupboard, I think. Father isn't allowed it, but he has no self-control."

Grant found the brandy and came back to find her slapping Tisdall's unconscious face with a light insistent tapotement.

"You seem to be good at this sort of thing," Grant said.

"Oh, I ran the Guides at school." She had a voice at once precise and friendly. "A ve-ry silly institution. But it varied the routine. That is the main thing, to vary the routine."

"Did you learn this from the Guides?" he asked, nodding at her occupation.

"Oh, no. They burn paper and smell salts and things. I learned this in Bradford Pete's dressing room."

"Where?"

"You know. The welterweight. I used to have great faith in Pete, but I think he's lost his speed lately. Don't you? At least, I *hope* it's his speed. He's coming to nicely." This last referred to Tisdall. "I think he'd swallow the brandy now."

While Grant was administering the brandy, she said: "Have you been giving him the third degree, or something? You're police aren't you?"

"My dear young lady—I don't know your name?"

"Erica. I'm Erica Burgoyne."

"My dear Miss Burgoyne, as the Chief Constable's daughter you must be aware that the only people in Britain who are subjected to the third degree are the police."

"Well, what did he faint for? Is he guilty?"

"I don't know," Grant said, before he thought.

"I shouldn't think so." She was considering the now spluttering Tisdall. "He doesn't look capable of much." This with the same grave detachment as she used to everything she did.

"Don't let looks influence your judgment, Miss Burgoyne."

"I don't. Not the way you mean. Anyhow, he isn't at all my type. But it's quite right to judge on looks if you know enough. You wouldn't buy a washy chestnut narrow across the eyes, would you?"

This, thought Grant, is quite the most amazing conversation.

She was standing up now, her hands pushed into her jacket pockets so much the much-tried garment sagged to two bulging points. The tweed she wore was rubbed at the cuffs and covered all over with "pulled" ends of thread where briars had caught. Her skirt was too short and one stocking was violently twisted on its stick of leg. Only her shoes—scarred like her hands, but thick, well-shaped, and expensive—betrayed the fact that she was not a charity child.

And then Grant's eyes went back to her face. Except her face. The calm sureness of that sallow little triangular visage was not bred in any charity school.

"There!" she said encouragingly, as Grant helped Tisdall to his feet and guided him into a chair. "You'll be all right. Have a little more of Father's brandy. It's a much better end for it than Father's arteries. I'm going now. Where is Father, do you know?" This to Grant.

"He has gone to lunch at The Ship."

"Thank you." Turning to the still dazed Tisdall, she said, "That shirt collar of yours is far too tight." As Grant moved to open the door for her, she said, "You haven't told me *your* name?"

"Grant. At your service." He gave her a little bow.

"I don't need anything just now, but I might some day." She considered him. Grant found himself hoping with a fervor which surprised him that he was not being placed in the same category as "washy chestnuts."

"You're much more my type. I like people broad across the cheekbones. Good-bye, Mr. Grant."

"Who was that?" Tisdall asked, in the indifferent tones of the newly conscious.

"Colonel Burgoyne's daughter."

"She was right about my shirt."

"One of the reach-me-downs?"

"Yes. Am I being arrested?"

"Oh, no. Nothing like that."

"It mightn't be a bad idea."

"Oh? Why?"

"It would settle my immediate future. I left the cottage this morning and now I'm on the road."

- "You mean you're serious about tramping?"
- "As soon as I have got suitable clothes."
- "I'd rather you stayed where I could get information from you if I wanted."
- "I see the point. But how?"
- "What about that architect's office? Why not try for a job?"
- "I'm never going back to an office. Not an architect's anyhow. I was shoved there only because I could draw."
- "Do I understand that you consider yourself permanently incapacitated from earning your bread?"
- "Phew! That's nasty. No, of course not. I'll have to work. But what kind of job am I fit for?"
- "Two years of hitting the high spots must have educated you to something. Even if it is only driving a car."
- There came a tentative tap at the door, and the sergeant put his head in.
- "I'm very sorry indeed to disturb you, Inspector, but I'd like something from the Chief's files. It's rather urgent."
- Permission given, he came in.
- "This coast's lively in the season, sir," he said, as he ran through the files. "Positively continental. Here's the chef at the Marine—it's just outside the town, so it's our affair—the chef at the Marine's stabbed a waiter because he had dandruff, it seems. The waiter, I mean, sir. Chef on the way to prison and waiter on the way to hospital. They think maybe his lung's touched. Well, thank you, sir. Sorry to disturb you."

Grant eyed Tisdall, who was achieving the knot in his tie with a melancholy abstraction. Tisdall caught the look, appeared puzzled by it, and then, comprehension dawning, leaped into action.

- "I say, Sergeant, have they a fellow to take the waiter's place, do you know?"
- "That they haven't. Mr. Toselli—he's the manager—he's tearing his hair."
- "Have you finished with me?" he asked Grant.
- "For today," Grant said. "Good luck."

No. No arrest," said Grant to Superintendent Barker over the telephone in the early evening. "But I don't think there's any doubt about its being murder. The surgeon's sure of it. The button in her hair might be an accident—although if you saw it you'd be convinced it wasn't—but her fingernails were broken with clawing at something. What was under the nails has gone to the analyst, but there wasn't much after an hour's immersion in salt water . . .'M? . . . Well, indications point one way certainly, but they cancel each other out, somehow. Going to be difficult, I think. I'm leaving Williams here on routine inquiry, and coming back to town tonight. I want to see her lawyer—Erskine. He arrived just in time for the inquest, and afterward I had Tisdall on my hands so I missed him. Would you find out for me when I can talk to him tonight. They've fixed the funeral for Monday. Golders Green. Yes, cremation. I'd like to be there, I think. I'd like to look over the intimates. Yes, I may look in for a drink, but it depends how late I am. Thanks."

Grant hung up and went to join Williams for a high tea, it being too early for dinner and Williams having a passion for bacon and eggs garnished with large pieces of fried bread.

"Tomorrow being Sunday may hold up the button inquiries," Grant said as they sat down. "Well, what did Mrs. Pitts say?"

"She says she couldn't say whether he was wearing a coat or not. All she saw was the top of his head over her hedge as he went past. But whether he wore it or not doesn't much matter, because she says the coat habitually lay in the back of the car along with that coat that Miss Clay wore. She doesn't remember when she saw Tisdall's dark coat last. He wore it a fair amount, it seems. Mornings and evenings. He was a 'chilly mortal,' she said. Owing to his having come back from foreign parts, she thought. She hasn't much of an opinion of him."

"You mean she thinks he's a wrong 'un?"

"No. Just no account. You know, sir, has it occurred to you that it was a clever man who did this job?"

"Why?"

"Well, but for that button coming off no one would ever have suspected anything. She'd have been found drowned after going to bathe in the early morning—all quite natural. No footsteps, no weapon, no signs of violence. Very neat."

"Yes. It's neat."

"You don't sound very enthusiastic about it."

"It's the coat. If you were going to drown a woman in the sea, would you wear an overcoat to do it?"

"I don't know. 'Pends how I meant to drown her."

"How would you drown her?"

"Go swimming with her and keep her head under."

"You'd have scratches that way, ten to one. Evidence."

"Not me. I'd catch her by the heels in shallow water and upend her. Just stand there and hold her till she drowned."

"Williams! What resource. And what ferocity."

"Well, how would you do it, sir?"

"I hadn't thought of aquatic methods. I mightn't be able to swim, or I mightn't like early-morning dips, or I might want to make a quick getaway from a stretch of water containing a body. No, I think I'd stand on a rock in deep water, wait till she came to talk to me, grip her head and keep it under. The only part of me that she could scratch that way would be my hands. And I'd wear leather gloves. It takes only a few seconds before she is unconscious."

"Very nice, sir. But you couldn't use that method anywhere within miles of the Gap."

"Why not?"

"There aren't any rocks."

"No. Good man. But there are the equivalent. There are stone groins."

"Yes. Yes, so there are! Think that was how it was done, sir?"

"Who knows? It's a theory. But the coat still worries me."

"I don't see why it need, sir. It was a misty morning, a bit chilly at six. Anyone might have worn a coat."

"Y-es," Grant said doubtfully, and let the matter drop, this being one of those unreasonable things which occasionally worried his otherwise logical mind (and had more than once been the means of bringing success to his efforts when his logic failed).

He gave Williams instructions for his further inquiries, when he himself should be in town. "I've just had another few minutes with Tisdall," he finished. "He has got himself a waiter's job at the Marine. I don't think he'll bolt, but you'd better plant a man. Sanger will do. That's Tisdall's car route on Thursday morning, according to himself." He handed a paper to the sergeant. "Check up on it. It was very early but someone may remember him. Did he wear a coat or not? That's the main thing. I think, myself, there's no doubt of his taking the car as he said. Though not for the reason he gave."

"I thought it a silly reason myself, when I read that statement. I just thought: 'Well, he might have made up a better one!' What's your theory, sir?"

"I think that when he had drowned her his one idea was to get away. With a car he could be at the other end of England, or out of the country, before they found her body! He drove away. And then something made him realize what a fool he was.

Perhaps he missed the button from his cuff. Anyhow, he realized that he had only to stay where he was and look innocent. He got rid of the telltale coat—even if he hadn't missed the button the sleeve almost up to the elbow must have been soaking with salt water—came back to replace the car, found that the body had been discovered thanks to an incoming tide, and put on a very good act on the beach. It wouldn't have been difficult. The very thought of how nearly he had made a fool of himself would have been enough to make him burst into tears."

"So you think he did it?"

"I don't know. There seems to be a lack of motive. He was penniless and she was a liberal woman. That was every reason for keeping her alive. He was greatly interested in her, certainly. He says he wasn't in love with her, but we have only his word for it. I think he's telling the truth when he says there was nothing between them. He *may* have suffered from frustration, but if that were so he would be much more likely to beat her up. It was a queerly cold-blooded murder, Williams."

"It was certainly that, sir. Turns my stomach." Williams laid a large forkful of best Wiltshire lovingly on a pink tongue.

Grant smiled at him: the smile that made Grant's subordinates "work their fingers to the bone for him." He and Williams had worked together often, and always in amity and mutual admiration. Perhaps, in a large measure because Williams, bless him, coveted no one's shoes. He was much more the contented husband of a pretty and devoted wife than the ambitious detective-sergeant.

"I wish I hadn't missed her lawyer after the inquest. There's a lot I want to ask him, and heaven knows where he'll be for the weekend. I've asked the Yard for her dossier, but her lawyer would be much more helpful. Must find out whom her death benefits. It was a misfortune for Tisdall, but it must have been lucky for a lot of people. Being an American, I suppose her will's in the States somewhere. The Yard will know by the time I get up."

"Christine Clay was no American, sir!" Williams said in a well-I-am-surprised-at-you voice.

"No? What then?"

"Born in Nottingham."

"But everyone refers to her as an American."

"Can't help that. She was born in Nottingham and went to school there. They do say she worked in a lace factory, but no one knows the truth of that."

"I forgot you were a film fan, Williams. Tell me more."

"Well, of course, what I know is just by reading *Screenland* and *Photoplay* and magazines like that. A lot of what they write is hooey, but on the other hand they'll never stop at truth as long as it makes a good story. She wasn't fond of being interviewed. And she used to tell a different story each time. When someone pointed out that that wasn't what she had said last time, she said: 'But that's so dull! I've thought of a much better one.' No one ever knew where they were with her. Temperament, they called it, of course."

"And don't you call it that?" asked Grant, always sensitive to an inflection.

"Well, I don't know. It always seemed to me more like—well, like protection, if you know what I mean. People can only get at you if they know what you're like—what matters to you. If you keep them guessing, they're the victims, not you."

"A girl who'd pushed her way from a lace factory in Nottingham to the top of the film world couldn't be very vulnerable."

"It's because she was from a lace factory that she was what-d'you-call-it. Every six months she was in a different social sphere, she went up at such a rate. That takes a lot of living up to—like a diver coming up from a long way below. You're continually adjusting yourself to the pressure. No, I think she needed a shell to get into, and keeping people guessing was her shell."

"So vou were a Clay fan, Williams."

"Sure I was," said Williams in the appropriate idiom. His pink cheeks grew a shade pinker. He slapped marmalade with venom onto his slab of toast. "And before this affair's finished I'm going to put bracelets on the chap that did it. It's a comforting thought."

"Got any theories yourself?"

"Well, sir, if you don't mind my saying so, you've passed over the person with the obvious motive."

"Who?"

"Jason Harmer. What was he doing snooping around at half past eight of a morning?"

"He'd come over from Sandwich. Spent the night at the pub there."

"So he said. Did the County people verify that?"

Grant consulted his notes.

"Perhaps they haven't. The statement was volunteered before they found the button, and so they weren't suspicious. And since then everyone has concentrated on Tisdall."

"Plenty of motive, Harmer has. Clay walks out on him, and he runs her to earth in a country cottage, alone with a man."

"Yes, very plausible. Well, you can add Harmer to your list of chores. Find out about his wardrobe. There's an SOS out for a discarded coat. I hope it brings in something. A coat's a much easier clue than a button. Tisdall, by the way, says he sold his wardrobe complete (except for his evening things) to a man called—appropriately enough—Togger, but doesn't know where his place of business is. Is that the chap who used to be in Craven Road?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he now?"

"Westbourne Grove. The far end."

"Thanks. I don't doubt Tisdall's statement. But there's just a chance there's the duplicate of that button on another coat. It might lead us to something." He got to his feet. "Well, on with the job of making bricks without straw! And talking of that Israelitish occupation, here's a grand sample of it to flavour your third cup."

He pulled from his pocket the afternoon edition of the *Sentinel*, the *Clarion's* evening representative, and laid it, with its staring headlines, "Was Clay's Death an Accident?" upward, by Williams's plate. "Jammy Hopkins!" Williams said, with feeling, and flung sugar violently into his black tea.

Marta Hallard, as befitted a leading lady who alternated between the St. James's and the Haymarket, lived in the kind of apartment block which has deep carpet on the stairs and a cloistered hush in the corridors. Grant, climbing the stairs with weary feet, appreciated the carpet even while his other self wondered about the vacuum cleaning. The dim pink square of the lift had fled upward as he came through the revolving door, and rather than wait for its return he was walking the two flights. The commissionaire had said that Marta was at home: had arrived about eleven from the theater with several people. Grant regretted the people, but was determined that this day was not going to end without his obtaining some light on Christine Clay and her entourage. Barker had failed to find the lawyer, Erskine, for him; his man said he was suffering from the shock of the last three days and had gone into the country over Sunday; address unknown. ("Ever heard of a lawyer suffering from shock?" Barker had said.) So the matter which most interested Grant—the contents of Christine Clay's will—must wait until Monday. At the Yard he had read through the dossier—still, of course, incomplete—which they had gathered together in the last twelve hours. In all the five sheets of it Grant found only two things remarkable.

Her real name, it appeared, was Christina Gotobed.

And she had had no lovers.

No public ones, that is. Even in those crucial years when the little Broadway hoofer was blossoming into the song-and-dance star, she seemed to have had no patron. Nor yet when, tiring of song-and-dance pictures, her ambition had reached out to drama; her rocket had shot to the stars under its own power, it would seem. This could only mean one of two things: that she had remained virgin until her marriage at twenty-six (a state of affairs which Grant, who had a larger experience of life than of psychology text-books, found quite possible) or that her favor was given only when her heart (or her fancy, according to whether you are sentimentalist or cynic) was touched. Four years ago Lord Edward Champneis (pronounced Chins), old Bude's fifth son, had met her in Hollywood, and in a month they were married. She was at that time shooting her first straight film, and it was generally agreed that she had "done well for herself" in her marriage. Two years later Lord Edward was "Christine Clay's husband."

He took it gracefully, it was reported; and the marriage had lasted. It had become a casual affair of mutual friendliness; partly owing to the demands of time and space that her profession made on Christine, and partly to the fact that Edward Champneis's main interest in life (after Christine) was to invade the uncomfortable interiors of ill-governed and inaccessible countries and then to write books about them. During the book-writing solstice he and Christine lived more or less under one roof, and were apparently very happy. The fact that Edward, although a fifth son, had nevertheless a large fortune of his own, inherited from his mother's brother (Bremer, the leather king), had done much to save the marriage from its most obvious dangers. And Edward's delighted pride in his wife did the rest.

Now, where in that life, as shown in the dossier, did a murder fit in? Grant asked himself, toiling up the padded stairs. Harmer? He had been her constant companion for the three months she had been in England. True, they had work in common (producers still liked to insert a song somewhere in the plot of Christine's films: the public felt cheated if they did not hear her sing), but the world which amuses itself had no doubt of their relations, whatever their colleagues thought. Or Tisdall? An ill-balanced boy, picked up in a moment of waywardness or generosity, at a time when he was reckless and without direction.

Well, he himself would find out more about Tisdall. Meanwhile he would find out about the Harmers of her life.

As he came to the top of the second flight, he heard the gentle sound of the lift closing, and he turned the corner to find Jammy Hopkins just taking his thumb from the bell push.

"Well, well," said Jammy, "it's a party!"

"I hope you have an invitation."

"I hope you have a warrant. People shriek for their lawyer nowadays at the very sight of a policeman on the mat. Look, Inspector," he said hurriedly in a different voice, "let's not spoil each other's game. We both thought of Marta. Let's pool results. No need for crowding."

From which Grant deduced that Hopkins was doubtful of his reception. He followed Grant into the little hall without giving his name, and Grant, while appreciating the ingenuity, rebelled at providing a cloak for the press.

"This gentleman is, I believe, from the Clarion," he said to the servant who had turned away to announce them.

"Oh!" she said, turning back and eyeing Hopkins without favor. "Miss Hallard is always very tired at night, and she has some friends with her at the moment—"

But luck saved Hopkins from any necessity for coercion. The double doors to the living room stood open, and from the room beyond came welcome in high excited tones.

"Mr. Hopkins! How charming! Now you can tell us what all these midday editions were talking about. I didn't know you knew Mr. Hopkins, Marta darling!"

"Who'd have thought I'd ever be glad to hear that voice!" Jammy murmured to Grant as he moved forward to greet the speaker, and Grant turned to meet Marta Hallard, who had come from the room into the hall.

"Alan Grant!" she said, smiling at him. "Is this business or pleasure?"

"Both. Do me a favor. Don't tell these people who I am. Just talk as you were talking before I came. And if you can get rid of

them fairly soon, I'd like to talk to you alone for a little."

"I'd do a lot more than that for you. Every time I tie these around my neck," she indicated a rope of pearls, "I remember you."

This was not because Grant had given her the pearls but because he had once recovered them for her.

"Come and meet the others. Who is your friend?"

"Not a friend. Hopkins of the Clarion"

"Oh. Now I understand Lydia's welcome. And they say professional people are publicity hounds!" She led Grant in, introduced people as they came. The first was Clement Clements, the society photographer, radiant in purple "tails" and a soft shirt of a pale butter color. He had never heard of an Alan Grant, and made it perfectly clear. The second was a Captain Somebody, a nondescript and humble follower of Marta's, who clung to his glass of whisky and soda as being the only familiar object in an unknown terrain. The third was Judy Sellers, a sulky fair girl who played "dumb" blondes from year's end to year's end, and whose life was one long fight between her greed and her weight. And the fourth was that intimate of the stars, Miss Lydia Keats, who was now talking all over Jammy Hopkins and enjoying herself immensely.

"Mr. Grant?" Jammy said, nastily, as Grant was introduced.

"Isn't it 'Mr.'?" Lydia asked, her ears pricked, her eyes snapping with curiosity.

"No, it isn't!"

But Hopkins met Grant's eye and lacked the courage of his desire. It would be folly to make an enemy of a C.I.D. Inspector.

"He has one of those Greek titles, you know, but he's ashamed to own it. Got it for rescuing a Greek royalist's shirt from a Greek laundry."

"Don't pay any attention to him, Mr. Grant. He loves to hear himself talk. I know, you see. He has interviewed me so often. But he never listens to a word I say. Not his fault, of course. Aries people are often talkative. I knew the first time he crossed my threshold that he was April born. Now you, Mr. Grant, are a Leo person. Am I right? No, you don't need to tell me. I know. Even if I couldn't feel it—here—" she thumped her skinny chest, "you have all the stigmata."

"I hope they're not very deadly?" Grant asked, wondering how soon he could disengage himself from this harpy.

"Deadly! My dear Mr. Grant! Don't you know anything of astrology? To be born in Leo is to be a king. They are the favorites of the stars. Born to success, predestined to glory. They are the great ones of the world."

"And when does one have to be born to qualify for a Leo benefit?"

"Between the middle of July and the middle of August. I should say that you were born in the first weeks of August." Grant hoped he didn't look as surprised as he felt. He had certainly been born on the 4th of August.

"Lydia's uncanny," Marta broke in, handing Grant a drink. "She did poor Christine Clay's horoscope about a year ago, you know, and foretold her death."

"And wasn't that a break!" drawled the Judy girl, poking among the sandwiches.

Lydia's thin face was convulsed with fury, and Marta hastened to pour oil. "You know that's not fair, Judy! It isn't the first time Lydia has been right. She warned Tony Pickin about an accident before he was smashed up. If he'd listened to her and taken a little more care, he'd have two legs today. And she told me about not accepting the Clynes' offer, and she—"

"Don't bother to defend me, Marta darling. The credit is not mine, in any case. I only read what is there. The stars don't lie. But one does not expect a Pisces person to have either the vision or the faith!"

"Seconds out of the ring," murmured Jammy, and hit the rim of his glass with his fingernail so that it made a light "ping." But there was to be no fight. Clements provided a distraction.

"What I want to know," he drawled, "is not what Lydia found in the stars but what the police found at Westover."

"What I want to know is who did her in?" Judy said, taking a large bite of sandwich.

"Judy!" Marta protested.

"Oh, bunk!" said Judy. "You know we're all thinking the same thing. Going around the possibilities. Personally I plump for Jason. Has anyone any advance on Jason?"

"Why Jason?" Clements asked.

"He's one of these smoldering types, all passion and hot baths."

"Smolder! Jason!" Marta protested. "What nonsense! He simmers. Like a merry kettle." Grant glanced at her. So she was sticking up for Jason? How much did she like him? "Jason's much too volatile to smolder."

"Anyhow," Clements said, "men who take hot baths don't commit murder. It's the cold-plungers who see red. They are possessed by a desire to get back on life for the suffering they have endured."

"I thought masochists were rarely sadists," Grant said.

"Whether or not, you can put Jason out of it," insisted Marta. "He wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Oh, wouldn't he," Judy said, and they all paused to look at her.

"What exactly does that mean?" Clements asked.

"Never mind. My bet's on Jason."

"And what was the motive?"

"She was running out, I suspect."

Marta interrupted sharply. "You know that's nonsense, Judy. You know quite well that there was nothing between them."

"I know nothing of the sort. He was never out of her sight."

"A bitch thinks all the world a bitch," murmured Jammy into Grant's ear.

"I suspect"—it was Lydia's turn to break into a growing squabble—"that Mr. Hopkins knows much more about it than we do. He's been down at Westover today for his paper."

Jammy was instantly the center of attraction. What did he think? What had the police got? Who did they think had done it? Were all these hints in the evening papers about her living with someone true?

Jammy enjoyed himself. He was suggestive about murderers, illuminating on murder, discursive about human nature, and libelously rude about the police and their methods, all with a pleased eye on the helpless Grant.

"They'll arrest the boy she was living with," he finished. "Take it from me. Tisdall's his name. Good-looking boy. He'll create a sensation in the dock."

"Tisdall?" they said, puzzled. "Never heard of him."

All but Judy Sellers.

Her mouth opened in dismay, stayed that way helplessly for a moment, and then shut tightly; and a blind came down over her face. Grant watched the display in surprised interest.

"I think it's utterly ridiculous," Marta was saying, scornfully. "Can you imagine Christine Clay in a furtive business like that! It's not in the part at all. I'd as soon—as soon—I'd as soon believe that Edward could commit a murder!"

There was a little laugh at that.

"And why not?" asked Judy Sellers. "He comes back to England to find his adored wife being unfaithful, and is overcome with passion."

"At six of a morning on a cold beach. Can't you see Edward!"

"Champneis didn't arrive in England till Thursday," offered Hopkins, "so that lets him out."

"I do think this is the most heartless and reprehensible conversation," Marta said. "Let's talk of something else."

"Yes, do," said Judy. "It's a profitless subject. Especially since you, of course, murdered her yourself."

"I!" Marta stood motionless in an aura of bewildered silence. Then the moment broke.

"Of course!" Clement said. "You wanted the part she was due to play in the new film! We'd forgotten that!"

"Well, if we're looking for motives, Clement, my sweet, you were raving mad with fury because she refused to be photographed by you. If I remember rightly, she said your works were like spilt gravy."

"Clement wouldn't drown her. He'd poison her," Judy said. "With a box of chocolates, Borgia-wise. No, come to think of it, Lejeune did it, in case he'd have to act with her. He's the virile type. His father was a butcher, and he probably inherited a callous mentality! Or how about Coyne? He would have killed her on the *Bars of Iron* set, if no one had been looking." She apparently had forgotten about Jason.

"Will you all kindly stop this silly chatter!" Marta said, with angry emphasis. "I know that after three days a shock wears off. But Christine was a friend of ours, and it's disgusting to make a game of the death of a person we all liked."

"Hooey!" said Judy, rudely. She had consumed her fifth drink. "Not one of us cared a brass farthing for her. Most of us are tickled to death she's out of the way."

In the bright cool of Monday morning Grant drove himself down Wigmore Street. It was still early and the street was quiet; Wigmore Street's clients do not stay in town for weekends. The flower shops were making up Saturday's roses into Victorian posies where their errant petals could be gently corseted. The antique shops were moving that doubtful rug to the other side of the window out of the too questioning gaze of the morning sun. The little cafés were eating their own stale buns for their morning coffee and being pained and haughty with inconsiderates who asked for fresh scones. And the dress shops took Saturday's bargains out of the cupboard and restored the original prices.

Grant, who was en route to see Tisdall's tailor, was a little disgruntled at the perversity of things. If Tisdall's coat had been made by a London tailor it would have been a simple matter to have the button identified by them as one used by them for coats, and for Tisdall's coat in particular. That wouldn't clinch the matter but it would bring the clinching appreciably nearer. But Tisdall's coat had been made, of all places, in Los Angeles. "The coat I had," he explained, "was too heavy for that climate, so I got a new one."

Reasonable, but trying. If the coat had been made by a London firm of standing, one could walk into their shop at any time in the next fifty years and be told without fuss and with benevolent politeness (provided they knew who you were) what kind of buttons had been used. But who was to say whether a Los Angeles firm would know what buttons they put on a coat six months ago! Besides, the button in question was wanted here. It could not very well be sent to Los Angeles. The best one could do was to ask them to supply a sample of the buttons used. If they remembered!

Grant's main hope was that the coat itself would turn up. An abandoned coat which could be identified as Tisdall's, with one button missing, would be the perfect solution. Tisdall was wearing the coat when he drove away the car. That was Sergeant Williams's contribution to the cause of justice and due promotion. He had found a farmer who had seen the car at the Wedmarsh crossroads a little after six on Thursday morning. About twenty past, he reckoned, but he hadn't a watch. Didn't need one. Tell the time any time of day, sun or no sun. He was driving sheep, and the car slowed down because of them. He was positive that the man driving was young and wore a dark coat. He didn't think he'd be able to identify the man, not on his oath, he wouldn't—but he had identified the car. It was the only car he had seen that morning.

Williams's other contribution had not been so happy. He reported that Jason Harmer had not stayed at the hotel he had given as his sleeping place at Sandwich. Had not stayed at Sandwich at all, in fact.

Grant had left his Sunday kidney and bacon untouched and had gone out without ado to interview Mr. Harmer. He found him in his pinkish flat at Devonshire House, covered in a purple silk dressing gown, black stubble, and sheet music.

"It's not often I'm up at this hour," he offered, pushing sheets of scrawled paper off a chair to make room for Grant. "But I've been sort of upset about Chris. Very good friends, we were, Inspector. Some people found her difficult, but me, no. 'Cause why? D'you know why? 'Cause we both felt no account and were afraid people'd find it out. Humans are awful bullies, you know. If you look and act like a million dollars they'll lick your boots. But you let them suspect that you don't think much of yourself and they're on you like ants on a dying wasp. I knew Chris was bluffing first time I set eyes on her. You can't tell me anything about bluffing. I bluffed my way into the States and I bluffed the publishers into printing my first song. They didn't find out about it till the song was a wow, and then they sort of thought it might be a good idea to forget about having one put over on them. Have a drink? Yes, it's a bit early. I don't usually myself till lunchtime, but it's the next best thing to sleep. And I've got two songs to finish on contract. For—for—" his voice died away—"for Coyne's new film," he went on with a rush. "Ever tried writing a song without an idea in your head? No. No, I suppose you haven't. Well, it's just plain torture. And who's going to sing them anyhow? That Hallard dame can't sing. Did you hear Chris sing 'Sing to Me Sometimes'?"

Grant had.

"Now that's what I call putting over a song. I've written better songs, I admit. But she made it sound like the best song that was ever written. What's the good of writing songs anyway, for that up-stage Hallard bird to make a mess of?"

He was moving about the room, picking up a pile of papers here only to set it down in an equally inappropriate place there. Grant watched him with interest. This was Marta's "merry kettle" and Judy's "smoldering type." To Grant he seemed neither. Just one of those rather ordinary specimens of humanity from some poor corner of Europe who believes he's being continually exploited and persecuted by his fellow men, self-pitying, ill-educated, emotional, and ruthless. Not good-looking, but attractive to women, no doubt. Grant remembered that two such widely differing types as Marta Hallard and Judy Sellers had found him remarkable; each reading her own meaning into his personality. He apparently had the ability to be all things to all men. He had been friendly to the disliked Marta, that was certain: Marta did not hotly defend indifferent worshippers at her shrine. He spent his life, that is to say, "putting on an act." He had admitted so much himself a moment ago. Was he putting on an act now? For Grant?

"I'm sorry to disturb you so early, but it was a matter of business. You know that we are investigating Miss Clay's death. And in the course of investigation it is necessary to check the movements of everyone who knew her, irrespective of persons or probabilities. Now, you told the sergeant of the County police force, when you talked to him on Thursday, that you had spent the night in a hotel at Sandwich. When this was checked in the ordinary course it was found that you hadn't stayed there."

Harmer fumbled among the music, without looking up.

"Where did you stay, Mr. Harmer?"

Harmer looked up with a small laugh. "You know," he said, "it's pretty funny at that! Charming gentleman calls in a perfectly friendly way about breakfast time, apologizing for disturbing you and hopes he isn't going to be a trouble to you but he's an inspector of police and would you be so very kind as to give some information because last time your information wasn't as accurate as it might have been. It's lovely, that's what it is. And you get results with it, too. Perhaps they just break down and sob, on account of all the friendliness. Pie like mother made. What I'd like to know is if that method goes in Pimlico or if you keep it for Park Lane."

"What I would like to know is where you stayed last Wednesday night, Mr. Harmer."

"The Mr., too, I guess that's Park Lane as well. In fact, if you'd been talking to the Jason of ten years back, you'd have had me to the station and scared hell out of me just like the cops of any other country. They're all the same; dough worshippers."

"I haven't your experience of the world's police forces, I'm afraid, Mr. Harmer."

Harmer grinned. "Stung you! A limey's got to be plenty stung before he's rude-polite like that. Don't get me wrong, though, Inspector. There aren't any police brands on me. As for last Wednesday night, I spent it in my car."

"You mean you didn't go to bed at all?"

"That's what I mean."

"And where was the car?"

"In a lane with hedges as high as houses each side, parked on the grass verge. An awful lot of space goes to waste in England in these verges. The ones in that lane were about forty feet wide."

"And you say you slept in the car? Have you someone who can bear witness to that?"

"No. It wasn't that kind of park. I was just sleepy and lost and couldn't be bothered going any further."

"Lost! In the east of Kent!"

"Yes, anywhere in Kent, if it comes to that. Have you ever tried to find a village in England after dark? Night in the desert is nothing to it. You see a sign at last that says Whatsit two and a half miles and you think: Good old Whatsit! Nearly there! Hurrah for England and signposts! And then half a mile on you come to a place where three ways fork, and there's a nice tidy signpost on the little bit of green in the middle and every blame one of that signpost's arms has got at least three names on it, but do you think one of them mentions Whatsit? Oh, no! That would make it far too easy! So you read 'em all several times and hope someone'll come past before you have to decide, but no one comes. Last person passed there a week last Tuesday. No houses; nothing but fields, and an advertisement for a circus that was there the previous April. So you take one of the three roads, and after passing two more signposts that don't take any notice of Whatsit, you come to one that says Whatsit, six and three-quarters. So you start off all over again, four miles to the bad, as it were, and it happens all over again. And again! And by the time Whatsit has done that on you half a dozen times, you don't care what happens as long as you can stop driving around corners and go to sleep. So I just stopped where I was and went to sleep. It was too late to drop in on Chris by that time, anyway."

"But not too late to get a bed at an inn."

"Not if you know where an inn is. 'Sides, judging by some of the inns I've seen here, I'd just as soon sleep in the car."

"You grow a heavy beard, I notice." Grant nodded at Harmer's unshaven chin.

"Yes. Have to shave twice a day, sometimes. If I'm going to be out late. Why?"

"You were shaved when you arrived at Miss Clay's cottage. How was that?"

"Carry my shaving things in the car. Have to, when you have a beard like mine."

"So you had no breakfast that morning?"

"No, I was planning to get breakfast from Chris. I don't eat breakfast anyway. Just coffee, or orange juice. Orange juice in England. My God, your coffee—what do you think they do to it? The women, I mean. It's—"

"Leaving the coffee aside for a moment, shall we come to the main point? Why did you tell the sergeant on duty that you had slept at Sandwich?"

The man's face changed subtly. Until then he had been answering at ease, automatically; the curves of his broad, normally good-natured face slack and amiable. Now the slackness went; the face grew wary, and—was it?—antagonistic.

"Because I felt there was something wrong, and I didn't want to be mixed up in it."

"That is very extraordinary, surely? I mean, that you should be conscious of evil before anyone knew that it existed."

"That's not so funny. They told me Chris was drowned. I knew Chris could swim like an eel. I knew that I had been out all night. And the sergeant was looking at me with a Who-are-you-and-what-are-you-doing-here expression."

"But the sergeant had no idea that the drowning was more than an accident. He had no reason to look at you in that way." Then he decided to drop the subject of Harmer's lie to the sergeant.

"How did you know, by the way, where to find Miss Clay? I understood that she kept her retreat a secret."

"Yes, she'd run away. Gave us all the runaround, in fact, including me. She was tired and not very pleased at the way her last picture had turned out. On the floor, I mean; it isn't released yet. Coyne didn't know how to take her. A bit in awe of her, and afraid at the same time she'd put one over on him. You know. If he'd called her 'kid' and 'chocolate' the way old Joe Myers used to back in the States, she'd have laughed and worked like a black for him. But Coyne's full of his own dignity, the 'big director' stuff, and so they didn't get on too good. So she was fed up, and tired, and everyone wanted her to go to different places for holidays, and it seemed she couldn't make up her mind, and then one day we woke up and she wasn't there. Bundle—that's her housekeeper—said she didn't know where she was, but no letters were to be forwarded and she'd turn up again in a month, so no one was to worry. Well, for about a fortnight no one heard of her, and then last Tuesday I met Marta Hallard at a sherry party at Libby Seemon's—she's going into that new play of his—and she said that on Saturday she had run into Chris buying chocolates at a place in Baker Street—Chris never could resist chocolates between pictures!—and she tried to worm out of Chris where she was hiding out. But Chris wasn't giving anything away. At least she thought she wasn't. She said: 'Perhaps I'm never

coming back. You know that old Roman who grew vegetables with his own hands and was so stuck on the result that he made the arrangement permanent. Well, yesterday I helped pull the first cherries for Covent Garden market and, believe me, getting the Academy Award for a picture is nothing to it!" "

Harmer laughed under his breath. "I can hear her," he said, affectionately. "Well, I went straight from Seemon's to Covent Garden and found out where those cherries came from. An orchard at a place called Bird's Green. And on Wednesday morning bright and early Jason sets off for Bird's Green. That took a bit of finding, but I got there about three o'clock. Then I had to find the orchard and the people who were working in it on Friday. I expected to find Chris straightaway, but it seemed that they didn't know her. They said that when they were picking, early on Friday morning, a lady passing in a car had stopped to watch and then asked if she might help. The old boy who owned the place said they didn't need paid help, but if she liked to amuse herself good and well. 'She were a good picker,' he said. 'wouldn't mind paying her another time.' Then his grandson said he'd seen the lady—or thought he'd seen her—one day lately in the post office at Liddlestone—about six miles away. So I found Liddlestone, but the post office regular staff was 'home to her tea' and I had to wait till she came back. She said that the lady who sent 'all the telegrams'—seems they never saw so many telegrams in their lives as Chris sent—was living over at Medley. So I set out in the half-dark to find Medley, and ended by sleeping in a lane. And sleeping out or no sleeping out, that was a better piece of detective work than you're doing this morning, Inspector Grant!"

Grant grinned good-humoredly. "Yes? Well, I've nearly done." He got up to go. "I suppose you had a coat with you in the car?"

"Sure."

"What was it made of?"

"Brown tweed. Why?"

"Have you got it here?"

"Sure." He turned to a wardrobe, built in the passage where the sitting room led into the bedroom, and pulled the sliding door open. "Have a look at my whole wardrobe. You're cleverer than I am if you can find the button."

"What button?" Grant asked, more quickly than he intended.

"It's always a button, isn't it?" Harmer said, the small pansy-brown eyes, alert under their lazy lids, smiling confidently into Grant's.

Grant found nothing of interest in the wardrobe. He had taken his leave not knowing how much to believe of Jason Harmer's story, but very sure that he had "nothing on him." The hopes of the police, so to speak, lay in Tisdall.

Now, as he pulled up by the curb in the cool bright morning, he remembered Jason's wardrobe, and smiled in his mind. Jason did not get his clothes from Stacey and Brackett. As he considered the dark, small, and shabby interior which was revealed to him as he opened the door, he could almost hear Jason laugh. The English! They'd had a business for a hundred and fifty years and this was all they could make of it. The original counters probably. Certainly the original lighting. But Grant's heart warmed. This was the England he knew and loved. Fashions might change, dynasties might fall, horses' shoes in the quiet street change to the crying of a thousand taxi hooters, but Stacey and Brackett continued to make clothes with leisured efficiency for leisured and efficient gentlemen.

There was now neither a Stacey nor a Brackett, but Mr. Trimley—Mr. Stephen Trimley (as opposed to Mr. Robert and Mr. Thomas!)—saw Inspector Grant and was entirely at Inspector Grant's service. Yes, they had made clothes for Mr. Robert Tisdall. Yes, the clothes had included a dark coat for wear with evening things. No, that certainly was not a button from the coat in question. That was not a button they had ever put on any coat. It was not a class of button they were in the habit of using. If the Inspector would forgive Mr. Trimley (Mr. Stephen Trimley), the button in question was in his opinion of a very inferior make, and would not be used by any tailor of any standing. He would not be surprised, indeed, to find that the button was of foreign origin.

"American, perhaps?" suggested Grant.

Perhaps. Although to Mr. Trimley's eye it suggested the Continent. No, he certainly had no reason for such a surmise. Entirely instinctive. Probably wrong. And he hoped the Inspector would not put any weight on his opinion. He also hoped that there was no question of Mr. Tisdall being in trouble. A very charming young man, indeed. The Grammar schools—especially the older Grammar schools of the country—turned out a very fine type of boy. Better often, didn't the Inspector think so? than came from the minor public schools. There was a yeoman quality of permanence about Grammar-school families—generation after generation going to the same school—that was not matched, outside the great public schools.

There being, in Grant's opinion, no yeoman quality of permanence whatever about young Tisdall, he forbore to argue, contenting himself by assuring Mr. Trimley that as far as he knew Mr. Tisdall was in no trouble up to date.

Mr. Trimley was glad to hear that. He was getting old, and his faith in the young generation which was growing up was too often sadly shaken. Perhaps every generation thought that the rising one lacked due standards of behavior and spirit, but it did seem to him this one . . . Ah, well, he was growing old, and the tragedy of young lives weighed more heavily on him than it used to. This Monday morning was blackened for him, yes, entirely blackened, by the thought that all the brightness that was Christine Clay was at this hour being transformed into ashes. It would be many years, perhaps generations (Mr. Trimley's mind worked in generations: the result of having a hundred-and-fifty-year-old business) before her like would be seen again. She had quality, didn't the Inspector think so? Amazing quality. It was said that she had a very humble origin, but there must be breeding somewhere. Something like Christine Clay did not just happen in space, as it were. Nature must plan for it. He was not what is known, he believed, as a film fan, but there was no picture of Miss Clay's which he had not seen since his niece had taken him to view her first essay in a dramatic role. He had on that occasion entirely forgotten that he was in a cinema. He was dazed with delight. Surely if this new medium could produce material of this strength and richness one need not continue to regret Bernhardt and Duse.

Grant went out into the street, marveling at the all-pervading genius of Christine Clay. The mind of all the world it seemed

was in that building at Golders Green. A strange end for the little lace-hand from Nottingham. Strange, too, for the world's idol. "And they put him in an oven just as if he were—" Oh, no, he mustn't think of that. Hateful. Why should it be hateful? He didn't know. The suburbanity of it, he supposed. Sensible, and all that. And probably much less harrowing for everyone. But someone whose brilliance had flamed across the human firmament as Clay's had should have a hundred-foot pyre. Something spectacular. A Viking's funeral. Not ovens in the suburb. Oh, my God, he was growing morbid, if not sentimental. He pressed the starter, and swung into the traffic.

He had yesterday changed his mind about going to the Clay funeral. The Tisdall evidence progressing normally, he had seen no need to give himself a harrowing hour which he could avoid. But only now did he realize how very glad he was to have escaped it, and (being Grant) began instantly to wonder whether after all he should have gone. Whether his subconscious desire to get out of it had influenced his decision. He decided that it had not. There was no need for him now to study the psychology of unknown friends of Christine's. He had had a good cross-section of them at Marta's, and had learned very little, after all. The party had stubbornly refused to break up. Jammy had begun to talk again, hoping that they would dance to his piping. But Marta vetoed any more talk of Christine, and although they had come back to her several times, not even Jammy's genius for evocation could keep them on the subject. Lydia, who could never stay off her own subject for long, had read their palms, chiromancy being a sideline of hers when horoscopes were not available (she had given a shrewd enough reading of Grant's character and had warned him about making a mistaken decision in the immediate future: "a nice safe thing to say to anyone," he had reflected) and it was not until one o'clock that the hostess had managed to shepherd them all to the door. Grant had lingered, not, curiously enough, because he had questions to ask her (the conversation had provided answers for him), but because she was anxious to question him. Was Scotland Yard called in to investigate Christine's death? What was wrong? What had they found? What did they suspect?

Grant had said that yes, they had been called in (so much would by now be common property) but that so far there was only suspicion. She had wept a little, becomingly, with not too disastrous effect on the mascara, had treated him to a short appreciation of Christine as artist and woman. "A grand person. It must have taken tremendous character to overcome her initial disadvantages." She enumerated the disadvantages.

And Grant had gone out into the warm night with a sigh for human nature—and a shrug for the sigh.

But there were bright spots even in human nature. Grant edged in toward the curb, and came to a halt, his brown face glad and welcoming.

"Good morning!" he called to the little gray figure.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Grant," Erica said, crossing the pavement to him. She gave him a brief little smile, but seemed pleased to see him; so much was apparent through her schoolboy matter-of-factness. She was dressed in her "town" clothes, he noticed; but they did not seem to be an improvement on her country ones. They were neat, certainly, but they had an unused look; and the gray suit she was wearing, although undoubtedly "good," was dowdy. Her hat had been got to match, and matched also in dowdiness.

"I didn't know you ever stayed in town."

"I don't. I came up to get a bridge."

"A bridge?"

"But it seems you can't get them by the yard. They have to be made to measure. So I've got to come up another day. All he did today was put a lot of clay in my mouth."

"Oh, the dentist. I see. I thought only old ladies had bridges."

"Well, you see, the silly thing he put in the last time doesn't hold. I'm always picking it out of bits of toffee. I lost a lot of side teeth when Flight fell with me at a post-and-rails last winter. I had a face like a turnip. So it had to be a bridge, he says."

"A misnomer, Flight."

"In one way. Not in another. He was nearly at the other end of Kent before they caught him."

"Where are you going now? Can I give you a lift anywhere?"

"I suppose you wouldn't like to show me Scotland Yard?"

"I would. Very much. But in twenty minutes I have an appointment with a lawyer in the Temple."

"Oh. In that case perhaps you would drop me in Cockspur Street. I have an errand to do for Nannie."

Yes, he thought, as she inserted herself beside him, it would be a Nannie. No mother had chosen those clothes. They were ordered from the tailor just as her school clothes had been. "One gray flannel suit and hat to match." In spite of her independence and her sureness of spirit, there was something forlorn about her, he felt.

"This is nice," she said. "They're not very high, but I hate walking in them."

"What are?"

"My shoes." She held up a foot and exhibited her very modest Cuban heel. "Nannie thinks they are the right thing to wear in town, but I feel dreadful in them. Teetery."

"I expect one gets used to them in time. One must conform to the taboos of the tribe."

"Why must one?"

"Because an unquiet life is a greater misery than wearing the badge of conformity."

"Oh, well. I don't come to town often. I suppose you haven't time to have an ice with me?"

"I'm afraid not. Let's postpone it until I'm back in Westover, shall we?"

"Of course, you'll be back. I had forgotten that. I saw your victim yesterday," she added conversationally.

"My victim?"

"Yes, the man who fainted."

"You saw him! Where?"

"Father took me over to luncheon at the Marine."

"But I thought your father hated the Marine?"

"He does. He said he'd never seen such a set of poisonous bloaters in his life. I think 'bloaters' is a little strong. They weren't so very bad. And the melon was very good."

"Did your father tell you that Tisdall was waiting there?"

"No, the sergeant did. He doesn't look very professional. Mr. Tisdall, not the sergeant. Too friendly and interested. No professional waiter looks interested. Not really. And he forgets the spoons for the ices. But I expect you upset him pretty thoroughly the day before."

"I upset him!" Grant took a deep breath and expressed his hope that Erica was not going to let the plight of a good-looking young man play havoc with her heart.

"Oh, no. Nothing like that. His nose is too long. Besides, I'm in love with Togare."

"Who is Togare?"

"The lion tamer, of course." She turned to look at him doubtfully. "Do you *really* mean that you haven't heard of Togare?" Grant was afraid that that was so.

"Don't you go to Olympia at Christmas? But you should! I'll get Mr. Mills to send you seats."

"Thank you. And how long have you been in love with this Togare?"

"Four years. I'm very faithful."

Grant admitted that she must be.

"Drop me at the Orient office, will you?" she said, in the same tone as she had announced her faithfulness. And Grant set her down by the yellow-funneled liner.

"Going cruising?" he asked.

"Oh, no. I go round the offices collecting booklets for Nannie. She loves them. She's never been out of England because she's terrified of the sea, but she likes to sit in safety and imagine. I got her some marvelous mountain ones from the Austrian place in Regent Street in the spring. And she's very knowledgeable about the German spas. Good-bye. Thank you for the lift. How shall I know when you come to Westover? For the ice, I mean."

"I shall send you word through your father. Will that do?"

"Yes. Good-bye." And she disappeared into the office.

And Grant went on his way to meet Christine Clay's lawyer and Christine Clay's husband, feeling better.

It was obvious at once why no one called Edward Champneis anything but Edward. He was a very tall, very dignified, very good-looking, and very orthodox person, with a manner of grave, if kindly, interest, and a rare but charming smile. Alongside the fretful movements of the fussy Mr. Erskine, his composure was like that of a liner suffering the administrations of a tug.

Grant had not met him before. Edward Champneis had arrived in London on Thursday afternoon, after nearly three months' absence, only to be greeted by the news of his wife's death. He had gone down immediately to Westover and identified the body, and on Friday he had interviewed the worried County Constabulary, puzzling over the button, and helped them to make up their minds that it was a case for the Yard. The thousand things waiting in town to be done as a result of his wife's death and his own long absence had sent him back to London just as Grant left it.

He looked very tired, now, but showed no emotion. Grant wondered under what circumstances this orthodox product of five hundred years of privilege and obligation would show emotion. And then, suddenly, as he drew the chair under him, it occurred to him that Edward Champneis was anything but orthodox. Had he conformed to the tribe, as his looks conformed, he would have married a second cousin, gone into the Service, looked after an estate, and read the *Morning Post*. But he had done none of those things. He had married an artist picked up at the other side of the world, he explored for fun, and he wrote books. There was something almost eerie in the thought that an exterior could be so utterly misleading.

"Lord Edward has, of course, seen the will," Erskine was saying. "He was, in fact, aware of its most important provisions some time ago, Lady Edward having acquainted him with her desires at the time the testament was made. There is, however, one surprise. But perhaps you would like to read the document for yourself."

He turned the impressive-looking sheet round on the table so that it faced Grant.

"Lady Edward had made two previous wills, both in the United States, but they were destroyed, on her instructions, by her American lawyers. She was anxious that her estate should be administered from England, for the stability of which she had a great admiration."

Christine had left nothing to her husband. "I leave no money to my husband, Edward Champneis, because he has always had, and always will have, more than he can spend, and because he has never greatly cared for money." Whatever he cared to keep of her personal possessions were to be his, however, except where legacies specifically provided otherwise. There were various bequests of money, in bulk or in annuities, to friends and dependents. To Bundle, her housekeeper and late dresser. To her Negro chauffeur. To Joe Myers, who had directed her greatest successes. To a bellhop in Chicago "to buy that gas station with." To nearly thirty people in all, in all parts of the globe and in all spheres of existence. But there was no mention of Jason Harmer.

Grant glanced at the date. Eighteen months ago. She had at that time probably not yet met Harmer.

The legacies, however generous, left the great bulk of her very large fortune untouched. And that fortune was left, surprisingly, not to any individual, but "for the preservation of the beauty of England." There was to be a trust, in which would be embodied the power to buy any beautiful building or space threatened by extinction and to provide for its upkeep.

That was Grant's third surprise. The fourth came at the end of the list of legacies. The last legacy of all read, "To my brother Herbert, a shilling for candles."

"A brother?" Grant said, and looked up inquiring.

"Lord Edward was unaware that Lady Edward had a brother until the will was read. Lady Edward's parents died many years ago, and there had been no mention of any surviving family except for herself."

"A shilling for candles. Does it convey anything to you, sir?" He turned to Champneis, who shook his head.

"A family feud, I expect. Perhaps something that happened when they were children. These are often the things one is more unforgiving about." He glanced toward the lawyer. "The thing I remember when I meet Alicia is always that she smashed my birds'-egg collection."

"But not necessarily a childhood quarrel," Grant said. "She must have known him much later."

"Bundle would be the person to ask. She dressed my wife from her early days in New York. But is it important? After all, the fellow was being dismissed with a shilling."

"It's important because it is the first sign of real enmity I have discovered among Miss Clay's relationships. One never knows what it might lead us to."

"The Inspector may not think it so important when he has seen this," Erskine said. "This, which I will give you to read, is the surprise I spoke of."

So the surprise had not been one of those in the will.

Grant took the paper from the lawyer's dry, slightly trembling hand. It was a sheet of the shiny, thick, cream-colored note-paper to be obtained in village shops all over England, and on it was a letter from Christine Clay to her lawyer. The letter was headed "Briars, Medley, Kent," and contained instructions for a codicil to her will. She left her ranch in California, with all stock and implements, together with the sum of five thousand pounds, to one Robert Stannaway, late of Yeoman's Row, London.

"That," said the lawyer, "was written on Wednesday, as you see. And on Thursday morning—" He broke off, expressively.

"Is it legal?" Grant asked.

"I should not like to contest it. It is entirely handwritten and properly signed with her full name. The signature is witnessed by Margaret Pitts. The provision is perfectly clear, and the style eminently sane."

"No chance of a forgery?"

"Not the slightest. I know Lady Edward's hand very well—you will observe that it is peculiar and not easy to reproduce—and moreover I am very well acquainted with her style, which would be still more difficult to imitate."

"Well!" Grant read the letter again, hardly believing in its existence. "That alters everything. I must get back to Scotland Yard. This will probably mean an arrest before night." He stood up.

"I'll come with you," Champneis said.

"Very good, sir," Grant agreed automatically. "If I may, I'll telephone first to make sure that the Superintendent will be there."

And as he picked up the receiver, the looker-on in him said: Harmer was right. We do treat people variously. If the husband had been an insurance agent in Brixton, we wouldn't take it for granted that he could horn in on a Yard conference!

"Is Superintendent Barker in the Yard, do you know? . . . Oh . . . At half past? That's in about twenty minutes. Well, tell him that Inspector Grant has important information and wants a conference straightaway. Yes, the Commissioner, too, if he's there." He hung up.

"Thankyou for helping us so greatly," he said, taking farewell of Erskine. "And by the way, if you unearth the brother, I should be glad to know."

And he and Champneis went down the dark, narrow stairs and out into the hot sunshine.

"Do you think," Champneis asked, pausing with one hand on the door of Grant's car, "there would be time for a drink, I feel the need of some stiffening. It's been a—a trying morning."

"Yes, certainly. It won't take us longer than ten minutes along the Embankment. Where would you like to go?"

"Well, my club is in Carlton House Terrace, but I don't want to meet people I know. The Savoy isn't much better—"

"There's a nice little pub up here," Grant said, and swung the car around. "Very quiet at this time. Cool, too."

As they turned the corner Grant caught sight of the news-sellers' posters. CLAY FUNERAL: UNPRECEDENTED SCENES. TEN WOMEN FAINT. LONDON'S FAREWELL TO CLAY. And (the Sentinel) CLAY'S LAST AUDIENCE.

Grant's foot came down on the accelerator.

"It was unbelievably ghastly," said the man beside him, quietly.

"Yes, I can imagine."

"Those women. I think the end of our greatness as a race must be very near. We came through the war well, but perhaps the effort was too great. It left us—epileptic. Great shocks do, sometimes." He was silent for a moment, evidently seeing it all again in his mind's eye. "I've seen machine guns turned on troops in the open—in China—and rebelled against the slaughter. But I would have seen that subhuman mass of hysteria riddled this morning with more joy than I can describe to you. Not because it was—Chris, but because they made me ashamed of being human, of belonging to the same species."

"I had hoped that at that early hour there would be very little demonstration. I know the police were counting on that."

"We counted on it too. That is why we chose that hour. Now that I've seen with my own eyes, I know that nothing could have prevented it. The people are insane."

He paused, and gave an unamused laugh. "She never did like people much. It was because she found people—disappointing that she left her money as she did. Her fans this morning have vindicated her judgment."

The bar was all that Grant had promised, cool, quiet, and undemanding. No one took any notice of Champneis. Of the six men present three nodded to Grant and three looked wary. Champneis, observant even in his pain, said: "Where do you go when you want to be unrecognized?" and Grant smiled. "I've not found a place yet," he admitted. "I landed in Labrador from a friend's yacht once, and the man in the village store said, 'You wear your mustache shorter now, Sergeant.' After that I gave up expecting."

They talked of Labrador for a little, and then of Galeria, where Champneis had spent the last few months.

"I used to think Asia primitive, and some of the Indian tribes of South America, but the east of Europe has them all beaten. Except for the towns, Galeria is still in the primeval dark."

"I see they've mislaid their spectacular patriot," Grant said.

"Rimnik? Yes. He'll turn up again when his party is ready. That's the way they run the benighted country."

"How many parties are there?"

"About ten, Î think, not counting subdivisions. There are at least twenty races in that boiling pot of a country, all of them clamoring for self-government, and all of them medieval in their outlook. It's a fascinating place. You should go there someday. The capital is their shopwindow—as nearly a replica of every other capital as they can make it. Opera, trams, electric light, imposing railway station, cinemas—but twenty miles into the country you'll find bride barter. Girls set in rows with their dowry at their feet, waiting to go to the highest bidder. I've seen an old country woman led raving mad out of a lift in one of the town buildings. She thought she was the victim of witchcraft. They had to take her to the asylum. Graft in the town and superstition in the country—and yet a place of infinite promise."

Grant let him talk, glad that for even a few minutes he might be able to forget the horror of the morning. His own thoughts were not in Galeria but in Westover. So he had done it, that good-looking emotionalist! He had screwed a ranch and five thousand out of his hostess and then made sure that he would not have to wait for it. Grant's own inclination to like the boy died an instant death. From now on Robert Tisdall would be no more to him than the bluebottle he swatted on the windowpane, a nuisance to be exterminated as quickly and with as little fuss as possible. If, away in the depths, he was sorry that the pleasant person who was the surface Tisdall did not exist, his main and overwhelming emotion was relief that the business was going to be cleared up so easily. There was little doubt of the result of the conference. They had evidence enough. And they

would have more before it came to a trial.

Barker, his Superintendent, agreed with him, and so did the Commissioner. It was a clear enough case. The man is broke, homeless, and at his wit's end. He is picked up by a rich woman at the psychological moment. Four days later a will is made in his favor. On the following morning very early, the woman goes to swim. He follows her ten minutes later. When her body is found he has disappeared. He reappears with an unbelievable tale about stealing the car and bringing it back. A black button is found twisted in the dead woman's hair. The man's dark coat is missing. He says it was stolen two days before. But a man identifies him as wearing it that morning.

Yes, it was a good enough case. The opportunity, the motive, the clue.

The only person to protest against the issue of the warrant was, strangely enough, Edward Champneis.

"It's too pat, don't you think?" he said. "I mean, would any man in his senses commit the murder the very next morning?"

"You forget, Lord Edward," Barker said, "that but for the merest chance there would be no question of murder at all."

"And moreover, time was precious to him," Grant pointed out. "There were only a few days left. The tenancy of the cottage expired at the end of the month. He knew that. She might not go bathing again. The weather might break, or she might be seized with a desire to go inland. More especially she might not go swimming in the early morning again. It was an ideal setting: a lonely beach in the very early morning, with the mist just rising. Too perfect a chance to let go to waste."

Yes, it was a good case. Edward Champneis went back to the house in Regent's Park which he had inherited with the Bremer fortune, and which between his peregrinations he called home. And Grant went down to Westover with a warrant in his pocket.

If there was one thing Toselli hated more than another it was the police. All his life he had been no poor hater, Toselli. As commis he had hated the maître d'hôtel, as maître d'hôtel he had hated the management, as the management: he hated many things: the chef, wet weather, his wife, the head porter's mustache, clients who demanded to see him at breakfast time—oh, many things! But more than all he hated the police. They were bad for business and bad for the digestion. It stopped his digestive juices flowing just to see one of them walk in through the glass doors. It was bad enough to remember his annual bill for New Year "presents" to the local officers—thirty bottles of Scotch, thirty of gin, two dozen champagne, and six of liqueur brandy it had come to last year—but to suffer the invasion of officers not so far "looked after," and therefore callous to the brittle delicacy of hotel well-being—well, it was more than Toselli's abundant flesh and high-pressured blood could stand.

That is why he smiled so sweetly upon Grant—all his life Toselli's smile had been stretched across his rage, like a tightrope spanning a chasm—and gave him one of the second-best cigars. Inspector Grant wanted to interview the new waiter, did he? But certainly! This was the waiter's hour off—between lunch and afternoon tea—but he should be sent for immediately.

"Stop!" said Grant. "You say the man is off duty? Do you know where he will be?"

"Very probably in his room. Waiters like to take the weight off their feet for a little, you understand."

"I'd like to see him there."

"But certainly. Tony!" Toselli called to a page passing the office door. "Take this gentleman up to the room of the new waiter."

"Thankyou," Grant said. "You'll be here when I come down? I should like to talk to you."

"I shall be here." Toselli's tone expressed dramatic resignation. His smile deepened as he flung out his hands. "Last week it was a stabbing affair in the kitchen, this week it is—what? theft? affiliation?"

"I'll tell you all about it presently, Mr. Toselli."

"I shall be here." His smile became ferocious. "But not for long, no! I am going to buy one of those businesses where one puts sixpence into a slot and the meal comes out. Yes. There, but there, would be happiness."

"Even there, there are bent coins," Grant said as he followed Tony to the lift.

"Sanger, you come up with me," he said as they passed through the busy hall. "You can wait for us here, Williams. We'll bring him out this way. Much less fuss than through the servants' side. No one will notice anything. Car waiting?"

"Yes, sir."

Grant and Sanger went up in the lift. In those few seconds of sudden quiet and suspended action, Grant found time to wonder why he had not shown his warrant and told Toselli what he had come for. That would have been his normal course. Why was he so anxious to have the bird in his hand? Was it just the canniness of his Scots ancestry coming out, or was there a presentiment that—that what? He didn't know. He knew only that he was here, he could not wait. Explanations could follow. He must have the man in his hands.

The soft sound of the lift in the silence was like the sound of the curtain going up.

At the very top of the colossal building which was the West-over Marine Hotel, were the quarters of those waiters who were resident: small single rooms set in a row close together under the roof. As the page put out a bony fist to knock on a door, Grant restrained him. "All right, thank you," he said, and page and liftman disappeared into the crowded and luxurious depths, leaving the two policemen on the deserted coconut-matted landing. It was very quiet up there.

Grant knocked.

Tisdall's indifferent voice bade him come in.

The room was so small that Grant's involuntary thought was that the cell that waited would be no great change. A bed on one side, a window on the other, and in the far wall two cupboard doors. On the bed lay Tisdall in his shirt sleeves, his shoes on the floor. A book lay open, face down, on the coverlet.

He had expected to see a colleague. That was obvious. At the sight of Grant his eyes widened, and as they traveled to Sanger, standing behind Grant in the doorway, realization flooded them.

Before Grant could speak, he said, "You can't mean it!"

"Yes, I'm afraid we do," Grant said. He said his regulation piece of announcement and warning, Tisdall sitting with feet dangling on the bed's edge, not apparently listening.

When he had finished Tisdall said slowly: "I expect this is what death is like when you meet it. Sort of wildly unfair but inevitable."

"How were you so sure what we had come for?"

"It doesn't need two of you to ask about my health." His voice rose a little. "What I want to know is why you're doing it? What have you against me? You can't have proved that button was mine because it wasn't. Why don't you tell me what you have found so that I can explain away whatever it was? If you have new evidence you can surely ask me for an explanation. I have a right to know, haven't I? Whether I can explain or not?"

"There isn't anything you could explain away, Tisdall. You'd better get ready to come with us."

Tisdall got to his feet, his mind still entangled in the unbelievableness of what was happening to him. "I can't go in these

things," he said, looking down at his waiter's dress. "Can I change?"

"Yes, you can change, and take some things with you." Grant's hands ran over his pockets in expert questioning, and came away empty. "But you'll have to do it with us here. Don't be too long about it, will you? You can wait there, Sanger," he added, and swung the door to, leaving Sanger outside. He himself moved over to lean against the windowsill. It was a long way to the ground, and Tisdall, in Grant's opinion, was the suicide type. Not enough guts to brazen a thing out. Not enough vanity, perhaps to like the limelight at any price. Certainly the "everyone sorry when I'm dead" type.

Grant watched him now with minute attention. To an outsider he was a casual visitor, propped casually in the window while he indulged in casual conversation. In reality he was ready for instant emergency.

But there was no excitement. Tisdall pulled his suitcase from under the bed, and began with automatic method to change into his tweed and flannels. Grant felt that if the man carried poison, it would be somewhere in his working garments, and unconsciously relaxed a little as the waiter's dress was cast aside. There was going to be no trouble. The man was coming quietly.

"I needn't have worried as to how I was going to live," Tisdall was saying. "There seems to be a moral somewhere in this very immoral proceeding. What do I do about a lawyer, by the way, when I have no money and no friends?"

"One will be provided."

"Like a table napkin. I see."

He opened the cupboard nearest to Grant, and began to take things from their hangers and fold them into his case.

"At least you can tell me what my motive was?" he said presently, as if a new thought had struck him. "You can mistake buttons; you can even wish a button on to a coat that never had it; but you can't pin a motive where there couldn't be one!"

"So you had no motive?"

"Certainly not. Quite the opposite. What happened last Thursday morning was the worst thing that has ever happened to me in my life. I should have thought that was obvious even to an outsider."

"And of course you had not the faintest idea that Miss Clay had made a codicil to her will leaving you a ranch and a large sum of money."

Tisdall had been readjusting the folds of a garment. He stopped now, his hands still holding the cloth, but motionless, and stared at Grant.

"Chris did that!" he said. "No. No, I didn't know. How wonderful of her!"

And for a moment doubt stirred in Grant. That had been beautifully done. Timing, expression, action. No professional actor could have done it better. But the doubt passed. He recrossed his legs, by way of shaking himself, recalled the charm and innocence of murderers he had known (Andrew Hamey, who specialized in marrying women and drowning them and who looked like a choir soloist, and others of even greater charm and iniquity) and then composed his mind to the peace of a detective who has got his man.

"So you've raked up the perfect motive. Poor Chris! She thought she was doing me such a good turn. Have I any defense at all, do you know?"

"That is not for me to say."

"I have a great respect for you, Inspector Grant. I think it probable that I shall be unavailingly protesting my innocence on the scaffold."

He pushed the nearer cupboard door to, and opened the further one. The door opened away from Grant, so that the interior of the cupboard was not visible. "But you disappoint me in one way. I thought you were a better psychologist, you know. When I was telling you the story of my life on Saturday morning, I really thought you were too good a judge to think that I could have done what you suspected me of. Now I find you're just a routine policeman."

Still keeping his hand on the doorknob, he bent down to the interior of the cupboard as if to take shoes from the floor of it.

There was the rasp of a key torn from its lock, the cupboard door swung shut, and even as Grant leaped the key turned on the inside.

"Tisdall!" he shouted. "Don't be a fool! Do you hear!" His mind raced over the antidotes for the various poisons. Oh, God, what a fool he had been! "Sanger! Help me to break this open. He's locked himself in."

The two men flung their combined weight on the door. It resisted their best efforts.

"Listen to me, Tisdall," Grant said between gasps, "poison is a fool's trick. We'll get you soon enough to give you an antidote, and all that will happen is that you'll suffer hell's pain for nothing. So think better of it!"

But still the door resisted them.

"Fire axe!" Grant said. "Saw it when we came up. On wall at the end of the passage. Quick!"

Sanger fled and in eight seconds was back with the axe.

As the first blow of it fell, a half-dressed and sleepy colleague of Tisdall's appeared from next door and announced, "You mek a noise like thet you hev the cops een!"

"Hey!" he added, seeing the axe in Sanger's grasp. "What the hell you theenk you do, eh?"

"Keep away, you fool! There's a man in that cupboard committing suicide."

"Suicide! Cupboard!" The waiter rubbed his black hair in perplexity, like a half-awakened child. "That is not a cupboard!" "Not a cupboard!"

"No, that is the what you call eet—leetle back stairs. For fire, you know."

"God!" said Grant, and made for the door.

"Where does it come out—the stairway?" he called back to the waiter.

"In the passage to the front hall."

"Eight flights," Grant said to Sanger. "Lift's quicker, perhaps." He rang. "Williams will stop him if he tries to go out by the door," he said, searching for comfort.

"Williams has never seen him, sir. At least I don't think so."

Grant used words he had forgotten since he stopped campaigning in France.

"Does the man on duty at the back know him?"

"Oh, yes, sir. That's what he's there for, to stop him. But Sergeant Williams was just waiting for us."

Words failed Grant altogether.

The lift appeared.

Thirty seconds later they were in the hall.

The pleased expectancy on Williams's pink face told them the worst. Williams had certainly not intercepted anyone.

People were arriving, people were departing, people were going to tea in the restaurant, people were going to eat ices in the sun lounge, to drink in the bar, to meet other people and go to tea at Lyons—the hall of the Marine was American in the catholicity of its inhabitants. To make oneself noticeable in that assembly it would be necessary to stand on one's hands and proceed so.

Williams said that a young brown-haired man, without a hat and wearing a tweed jacket and flannels had gone out about five minutes previously. In fact, two of them had gone out.

"Two of them! You mean together!"

No, Williams meant that two separate men answering to that description had gone out in the last five minutes. If it came to that, here was another.

Yes, there was another. And watching him, Grant was filled with a despair that ran up from his feet like a wave hitting him and flooding his whole being. Yes, *indeed* there would be others. In Kent alone at this moment were ten thousand men whose description corresponded to Tisdall's.

Grant pulled himself together and turned to the ungrateful task of forming a police cordon.

That was the biggest scoop of Jammy Hopkins's life. The other papers that evening appeared on the street with horrifying photographs of the mob at Golders Green—Medusalike heads, close-up, screaming into the camera: disheveled Furies with streaming locks and open mouths clawing each other in an abandon of hate—and thought that they were doing rather well. Nothing, surely, was as important today as the Clay funeral. And their photographers had done them proud. They could afford to be pleased.

But not for nothing had Hopkins trailed Grant from Wig-more Street to the Orient offices, and from the Orient offices to the Temple, and from the Temple to the Yard. Not for nothing had he cooled his heels round the corner while his paid henchman kept watch on the Yard and gave him the sign when Grant left. Not for nothing had he followed him all the way to West-over. "CLAY MURDERED" announced the Sentinel posters. "CLAY MURDERED: ARREST!" And the crowds milled around the excited newsboys, and in the other offices there was tearing of hair, and much talk of sacking. In vain to point out to irate editors that Scotland Yard had said that when there was publishable news they should be told. What were they paid for, the editors would like to know? Sitting on their behinds waiting to be called up, and given official scraps of information? What did they think they were? Tote officials?

But Jammy was in high favor with the powers who signed his paycheck. Jammy settled into residence at the Marine—much more palatially than Grant, who also had a bedroom there but was to spend most of his life in the immediate future at the police station—and gave thanks to the stars which had ordained so spectacular an end for Christine Clay.

As for Grant, he was—as he had known he would be—snowed under with information. By Tuesday noon Tisdall had been seen in almost every corner of England and Wales, and by teatime was beginning to be seen in Scotland. He had been observed fishing from a bridge over a Yorkshire stream and had pulled his hat suspiciously over his face when the informant had approached. He had been seen walking out of a cinema in Aberystwyth. He had rented a room in Lincoln and had left without paying. (He had quite often left without paying, Grant noticed.) He had asked to be taken on a boat at Lowestoft. (He had also asked to be taken on a boat at half a dozen other places. The number of young men who could not pay their landladies and who wanted to leave the country was distressing.) He was found dead on a moor near Penrith. (That occupied Grant the best part of the afternoon.) He was found intoxicated in a London alley. He had bought a hat in Hythe, Grantham, Lewes, Tonbridge, Dorchester, Ashford, Luton, Aylesbury, Leicester, Chatham, East Grinstead, and in four London shops. He had also bought a packet of safety pins in Swan and Edgars. He had eaten a crab sandwich at a quick lunch counter in Argyll Street, two rolls and coffee in a Hastings bun shop, and bread and cheese in a Haywards' Heath inn. He had stolen every imaginable kind of article in every imaginable kind of place—including a decanter from a glass-and-china warehouse in Croydon. When asked what he supposed Tisdall wanted a decanter for, the informant said that it was a grand weapon.

Three telephones kept ringing like demented things, and by post, telegram, wireless, and personal appearance the information poured in. Nine-tenths of it quite useless, but all of it requiring a hearing: some of it requiring much investigation before its uselessness became apparent. Grant looked at the massed pile of reports, and his self-control deserted him for a little.

"It's a big price to pay for a moment's lack of wit," he said.

"Cheer up, sir," said Williams. "It might be worse."

"Might be worse! Would you tell me what occurrence would, in your opinion, augment the horror of the situation?"

"Oh, well, so far no nut has come to confess to the crime, and waste our time that way."

But the nut arrived next morning.

Grant looked up from inspecting a dew-drenched coat which had just been brought in, to see Williams closing the door mysteriously and mysteriously advancing on him.

"What is it, Williams?" he asked, his voice sharp with anticipation.

"The nut," Williams said.

"The what?"

"The person to make a confession, sir." Williams's tone held a shade of guilt now, as if he felt that by mentioning the thing vesterday he had brought the evil to pass.

Grant groaned.

"Not a bit the usual kind, sir. Quite interesting. Very smart."

"Outside or inside?"

"Oh, her clothes, I meant, sir."

"Her! Is it a woman?"

"Yes. A lady, sir."

"Bring her in." Rage ran over him in little prickles. How dare some sensation-mad female waste his time in order to satisfy her perverted and depraved appetite.

Williams swung the door back and ushered in a bright fashionable figure.

It was Judy Sellers.

She said nothing, but came into the room with a sulky deliberation. Even in his surprise at seeing her, Grant thought how

Borstal she was in spite of her soigné exterior. That air of resentment against the world in general and her own fate in particular was very familiar to him.

He pulled out a chair in silence. Grant could be very intimidating.

"All right, Sergeant," he said, "there won't be any need for you to stay." And then, to Judy as Williams went: "Don't you think this is a little unfair, Miss Sellers?"

"Unfair?"

"I am working twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four, on dreadfully important work, and you see fit to waste my time by treating us to a bogus confession."

"There's nothing bogus about it."

"It's so bogus that I have a good mind to dismiss you now, without another word."

She stayed his half-movement to the door. "You can't do that. I'll just go to another police station and confess and they'll send me on to you. I did it, you see!"

"Oh, no, you didn't."

"Why not?"

"For one thing, you weren't near the place."

"How do you know where I was?"

"You forget that in the course of conversation on Saturday night it was apparent that on Wednesday night you were at Miss Keats's house in Chelsea."

"I was only there for cocktails. I left early because Lydia was going to a party up the river."

"Even so, that makes it rather unlikely that you should be on a beach near Westover shortly after dawn next morning."

"It wouldn't be at all surprising if I were in the north of England next morning. I motored down if you want to know. You can inquire at my flat. The girl I live with will tell you that I didn't come home till lunchtime on Thursday."

"That hardly proves that your activities were murderous."

"They were, though. I drove to the Gap, hid in the wood, and waited till she came to swim."

"You were, of course, wearing a man's coat?"

"Yes, though I don't know how you knew. It was cold driving, and I wore one of my brother's that was lying in the car."

"Did you wear the coat to go down to the beach?"

"Yes. It was dithering cold. I don't like bathing in the dawn."

"You went bathing!"

"Of course I did. I couldn't drown her from the shore, could I?"

"And you left the coat on the beach?"

"Oh, no," she said with elaborate sarcasm. "I went swimming in it."

And Grant breathed again. For a moment he had had a fright.

"So you changed into swimming things, walked down to the beach with your brother's coat over you, and—then what?"

"She was a fair way out. I went in, swam up to her, and drowned her."

"How?"

"She said, 'Hello, Judy.' I said, 'Hello.' I gave her a light tap on the chin. My brother taught me where to hit a person's chin, so as to addle them. Then I dived under her and pulled her through the water by the heels until she was drowned."

"Very neat," Grant said. "You've thought it all out, haven't you? Have you invented a motive for yourself, too?"

"Oh, I just didn't like her. I hated her, if you want to know. Her success and her looks and her self-sufficiency. She got in my hair until I couldn't bear it another day."

"I see. And will you explain why, having achieved the practically perfect murder, you should calmly come here and put a noose around your neck?"

"Because you've got someone for it."

"You mean because we've got Robert Tisdall. And that explains everything. And now having wasted some precious minutes of my time, you might recompense me and rehabilitate yourself at the same time, by telling me what you know of Tisdall."

"I don't know anything. Except that he would be the very last person in the world to commit a murder. For any reason."

"You knew him fairly well, then?"

"No. I hardly knew him at all."

"You weren't-friends?"

"No, nor lovers, if that's what you're trying to say. Bobby Tisdall didn't know I was alive, except to hand me a cocktail."

Grant's tone changed. "And yet you'd go even to this length to get him out of a jam?" he said, quite kindly.

She braced into resentment at the kindness, "If you'd committed a murder wouldn't you confess to save an innocent person?"

"Depends on how innocent I thought the police were. You underrate us, Miss Sellers."

"I think you're a lot of idiots. You got a man who is innocent. You're busy hounding him to death. And you won't listen to a perfectly good confession when you get one."

"Well, you see, Miss Sellers, there are always things about a case that are known only to the police and are not to be learned from newspapers. The mistake you made was to get up your story from the newspaper accounts. There was one thing you didn't know. And one thing you forgot."

"What did I forget?"

"That no one knew where Christine Clay was staying."

"The murderer did."

"Yes. That is my point. And now-I'm very busy."

"So you don't believe a word I say."

"Oh, yes. Quite a lot of it. You were out all night on Wednesday, you probably went swimming, and you arrived back at lunchtime on Thursday. But none of that makes you guilty of murder."

She got up, in her reluctant, indolent way, and produced her lipstick. "Well," she drawled between applications, "having failed in my little bid for publicity, I suppose I must go on playing blonde nitwits for the rest of my life. It's good I bought a day-return."

"You don't fool me," Grant said, with a not too grim smile as he opened the door for her.

"All right, then, maybe you're right about that, and blast you anyhow," she burst out. "But you're wrong about his doing it. So wrong that your name will stink before this case is over."

And she brushed past an astonished Williams and two clerks, and disappeared.

"Well," said Williams, "that's the first. Humans are queer, aren't they, sir? You know, if we announced the fact that the coat we want has a button missing, there'd be people who would pull the button off their coats and bring it in. Just for fun. As if things weren't difficult enough without that. Not just the usual type, though, was she, sir?"

"No. What did you make of her, Williams?"

"Musical comedy. Looking for publicity to help her career. Hard as nails."

"All wrong. Legitimate stage. Hates her career. Softhearted to the point of self-sacrifice."

Williams looked a little crestfallen. "Of course, I didn't have a chance to talk to her," he reminded.

"No. On looks it was quite a good reading, Williams. I wish I could read this case as well." He sat down and ran his fingers through his hair. "What would you do, Williams, once you had got clear of the Marine?"

Williams understood that he was supposed to be Tisdall.

"I'd take a fairly crowded bus somewhere. First that came to hand. Get off with a crowd of others, and walk off as if I knew where I was going. In fact, wherever I went I'd look as if I knew where I was going."

"And then, what?"

"I'd probably have to take another bus to get out of townified parts."

"You'd get out of built-up areas, would you?"

"Sure!" said Williams, surprised.

"A man's much more conspicuous in open country."

"There are woods. In fact, some of the woods in this part of the world would hide a man indefinitely. And if a man got as far west as Ashdown Forest, well, it'd take about a hundred men to comb Ashdown properly."

Grant shook his head. "There's food. And lodging."

"Sleep out. It's warm weather."

"He's been out two nights now. If he has taken to the country he must be looking shopworn by this time. But has he? Have you noticed that no one has reported him as buying a razor? There's just the chance that he's with friends. I wonder—" his eyes strayed to the chair where Judy had been sitting. "But no! She'd never risk as big a bluff as that. No need for it."

Williams wished to himself that Grant would go to the hotel and have some sleep. He was taking far too much to heart his failure to arrest Tisdall. Mistakes happened to the best of people, and everyone knew that Grant was all right. He had the Yard solid behind him. Why need he worry himself sick over something that might have happened to anyone? There were one or two crabbers, of course—people who wanted his job—but no one paid any attention to the likes of them. Everyone knew what they were getting at. Grant was all right, and everyone knew it. It was silly of him to get so worked up over a little slip.

If a policeman's heart can be said to ache, then Williams's stout heart ached for his superior.

"You can get rid of this disgusting object," Grant said, indicating the coat. "It's twenty years old, at least, and hasn't had a button on it for the last ten. That's one thing that puzzles me, you know, Williams. He had it at the beach, and it was missing when he came back. He had to get rid of that coat somewhere along his route. It isn't a very extensive route, when all is said. And there wasn't time for him to go far off it. He'd be too anxious to get back and cover up his mistake in going away. And yet we haven't turned the coat up. Two duck ponds, both shallow, both well dragged. Three streams that wouldn't hide a penny and wouldn't float a paper boat. Ditches beaten, garden walls inspected on the wrong side, two copses scoured. Nothing! What did he do with it? What would you do with it?"

"Burn it."

"No time. It's damp too. Soaking wet, probably."

"Roll it small and stick it in the fork of a tree. Everyone looks on the ground for things."

"Williams, you're a born criminal. Tell Sanger your theory and ask him to make use of it this afternoon. I'd rather have that coat than have Tisdall. In fact, I've got to have that coat!"

"Talking of razors, you don't think maybe, he took his razor with him, sir?"

"I didn't think of it. Shouldn't think he had the presence of mind. But then I didn't think he'd have the nerve to bolt. I concentrated on suicide. Where are his things?"

"Sanger took them over here in the case. Everything he had."

"Just see if his razor is there? It's just as well to know whether he's shaved or not."

There was no razor.

"Well!" said Grant. "Who'd have thought it! 'You disappoint me, Inspector,' says he, quietly pocketing the razor, and arranging his getaway with the world's prize chump of a detective watching him. I'm all wrong about that lad, Sergeant. All wrong. I thought first, when I took him from the inquest that he was one of these hysterical, do-it-on-the-spur-of-the-moment creatures. Then, after I knew about the will, I changed my mind. Still thought him a 'poor thing,' though. And now I find he was planning a getaway under my very nose—and he brought it off! It isn't Tisdall who's a washout, it's me!"

"Cheer up, sir. Our luck is out at the moment. But you and I between us, and no one else, so help me, are going to put that cold-blooded brute where he belongs," Williams said fervently, not knowing that the person who was to be the means of bringing the murderer of Christine Clay to justice was a rather silly little woman in Kansas City who had never heard of any of them.

Erica stood on the brake and brought her disreputable little car to a standstill. She then backed it the necessary yards, and stopped again. She inspected with interest the sole of a man's boot, visible in the grass and gorse, and then considered the wide empty landscape and the mile-long straight of chalky lane with its borders of speedwell and thrift, shining in the sun.

"You can come out," she said. "There's no one in sight for miles."

The boot sole disappeared and a man's astonished face appeared in the bushes above it.

"That's a great relief to me," Erica observed. "I thought for a moment that you might be dead."

"How did you know it was me? I suppose you did know it was me?"

"Yes. There's a fanny squiggle on the instep part of your sole where the price has been scored off. I noticed it when you were lying on the floor of Father's office."

"Oh, yes; that's who you are, of course. You're a very good detective."

"You're a very bad escaper. No one could have missed your foot."

"You didn't give me much time. I didn't hear your car till it was nearly on me."

"You must be deaf. She's one of the County jokes, poor Tinny. Like Lady Middleway's hat and old Mr. Dyne's shell collection."

"Tinny?"

"Yes. She used to be Christina, but the inevitable happened. You couldn't not have heard her."

"I think perhaps I was asleep for a minute or two. I—I'm a bit short of sleep."

"Yes, I expect so. Are you hungry?"

"Is that just an academic question, or—or are you offering me food?"

Erica reached into the back of the car and produced half a dozen rolls, a glass of tongue, half a pound of butter, and four tomatoes.

"I've forgotten a tin opener," she said, passing him the tongue, "but if you hit the tin lid hard with a flint it will make a hole." She split a roll with a penknife produced from her pocket and began to butter it.

"Do you always carry food about with you?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Oh, always. I'm a very hungry person. Besides I'm often not home from morning till night. Here's the knife. Cut a hunk of the tongue and lay it on that." She gave him the buttered roll. "I want the knife back for the other roll."

He did as he was bidden, and she busied herself with the knife again, politely ignoring him so that he should not have to pretend to an indifference that would be difficult of achievement.

Presently he said, "I suppose you know that all this is very wrong."

"Why is it wrong?"

"For one thing, you're aiding an escaped criminal, which is wrong in itself, and doubly wrong in your father's daughter. And for another—and this is much worse—if I were what they think me you'd be in the gravest danger at this minute. You shouldn't *do* things like that, you know."

"If you were a murderer it wouldn't help you much to commit another one just to keep me from saying I saw you."

"If you've committed one, I suspect you don't easily stop at another. You can only be hanged once. And so you don't think I did it?"

"I'm quite sure you didn't."

"What makes you so sure?"

"You're not capable of it."

"Thank you," he said gratefully.

"I didn't mean it that way."

"Oh! Oh, I see." A smile actually broke through. "Disconcerting but invigorating. George an ancestor of yours?"

"George? Oh. No. No, I can tell lies with the best."

"You'll have to tonight. Unless you are going to give me up."

"I don't suppose anyone will question me at all," she said, ignoring the latter half of his remark. "I don't think a beard becomes you, by the way."

"I don't like it myself. I took a razor with me but couldn't manage to do anything without soap and water. I suppose you haven't soap in the car?"

"I'm afraid not. I don't wash as often as I eat. But there's a frothy stuff in a bottle—Snowdrop, they call it—that I use to clean my hands when I change a wheel. Perhaps that would work." She got out the bottle from the car pocket. "You must be much cleverer than I thought you were, you know."

"Yes? How clever does that make me actually?"

"To get away from Inspector Grant. He's very good at his job, Father says."

"Yes, I think he probably is. If I didn't happen to have a horror of being shut up, I wouldn't have had the nerve to run. As it was, that half hour was the most exciting thing that ever happened to me. I know now what living at top speed means. I used to

think having money and doing what you liked—twenty different things a day—was living at speed. But I just didn't know anything about it."

"Was she nice, Christine Clay?"

He looked disconcerted. "You do jump about, don't you? Yes, she was a grand person." He forgot his food for a moment. "Do you know what she did? She left me her ranch in California because she knew I had no money and hated an office."

"Yes, I know."

"You know?"

"Yes, I've heard Father and the others discussing it."

"Oh. Oh, yes. . . . And you still believe I didn't do it? I must be very bargain counter in your eyes!"

"Was she very beautiful?"

"Haven't you ever seen her, then? On the screen, I mean?"

"No. I don't think so."

"Neither have I. Funny, isn't it. I suppose, roaming from place to place it's easy to miss pictures."

"I'm afraid I don't go to the cinema often. It's a long way to a good one from our place. Have some more tongue."

"She meant to do me such a good turn—Chris. Irony, isn't it? That her gift should be practically my death warrant."

"I suppose you have no idea who could have done it?"

"No. I didn't know any of her friends, you know. She just picked me up one night." He considered the schoolgirlish figure before him. "I suppose that sounds dreadful to you?"

"Oh, no. Not if you liked the look of each other. I judge a lot on looks."

"I can't help feeling that the police may be making a mistake—I mean, that it was just an accident. If you'd seen the country that morning. Utterly deserted. No one going to be awake for at least another hour. It's almost incredible that someone should have been out for murder at that time and in that place. That button *might* be an accident, after all."

"If your coat turned up with the buttons on it, would that prove you had nothing to do with it?"

"Yes, I think so. That seemed to be all the evidence the police had." He smiled a little. "But you know more about it than I do."

"Where were you when you lost it—the coat, I mean?"

"We'd gone over to Dymchurch one day: Tuesday, it was. And we left the car to walk along the seawall for about half an hour. Our coats were always left lying in the back. I didn't miss mine till we stopped for petrol about halfway home, and I turned around to get the bag Chris had flung there when she got in." His face suddenly flamed scarlet, and Erica watched him in surprise and then in embarrassment. It was moments later before it occurred to her that the tacit admission that the woman was paying was more humiliating to him than any murder accusation. "The coat wasn't there then," he went on hurriedly, "so it could only have gone while we were walking."

"Gypsies?"

"I don't think so. I didn't see any. A casual passerby, more likely."

"Is there anything to tell that the coat is yours? You'd have to prove it to the police, you know."

"My name is on the lining—one of those tailor's tags, you know."

"But if it was stolen that would be the first thing they'd take off."

"Yes. Yes, I suppose so. There's another thing, though. There's a small burn on the right-hand side below the pocket, where someone held a cigarette against it."

"That's better, isn't it! That would settle it very nicely."

"if the coat were found!"

"Well, no one who stole a coat is likely to bring it to the police station just because the police want it. And the police are not looking for coats *on* people. They're looking for discarded ones. So far no one has done anything about getting *your* coat. On your behalf, I mean. To be evidence for you."

"Well, what can I do?"

"Give yourself up."

"What!"

"Give yourself up. Then they'll give you a lawyer and things. And it will be his business to look for the coat."

"I couldn't do that. I just couldn't, What's-Your-Name."

"Erica."

"Erica. The thought of having a key turned on me gives me the jitters."

"Claustrophobia?"

"Yes. I don't really mind closed spaces as long as I know that I can get out. Caves and things. But to have a key turned on me, and then to have nothing to do but sit and think of—I just couldn't do it."

"No, I suppose you couldn't, if you feel like that about it. It's a pity. It's much the most sensible way. What are you going to do now?"

"Sleep out again, I suppose. There's no rain coming."

"Haven't you any friends who'd look after you?"

"With a murder charge against me? No! You overrate human friendship." He paused a moment, and added, in a surprised voice: "No. No, perhaps you don't, at that. I've just not met the right kind before."

"Then we had better decide on a place where I can meet you tomorrow and bring you some more food. Here, if you like."

"No!"

"Where then?"

"I didn't mean that. I mean that you're not meeting me anywhere."

"Why not?"

"Because you'd be committing a felony, or whatever it is. I don't know what the penalty is, but you'd be a criminal. It can't be done."

"Well, you can't stop me dropping food out of the car, can you? There is no law against that, that I know of. It will just happen that a cheese and a loaf and some chocolates will fall out of the car into these bushes tomorrow morning. I must go now. The landscape looks deserted, but if you leave a car standing long enough someone always pops up to make inquiries."

She swept the refuse of the food into the car, and got in herself.

He made a movement to get to his feet.

"Don't be foolish," she said sharply. "Keep down."

He swiveled around on his knees. "All right. You can't object to this position. And it expresses my feelings much better."

She shut the car door, and leaned over it.

"Nut or plain?"

"What?"

"The chocolate."

"Oh! The kind with raisins in it, please. Some day, Erica Burgoyne, I shall crown you with rubies and make you to walk on carpets rich as—"

But the sentence was lost in the roar of Tinny's departure.

Kindness," said Erica, to her father's head groom, "have you anything laid by?"

Kindness paused in his checking the corn account, shot her a pale glance from a wrinkled old eye, and went on with his adding.

"Tuppence!" he said at length, in the tone one uses instead of a spit.

This referred to the account, and Erica waited. Kindness hated accounts.

"Enough to bury me decent," he said, having reached the top of the column again.

"You don't want to be buried yet a while. Could you lend me ten pounds, do you think?"

The old man paused in licking his stub of pencil, so that the lead made a purple stain on the exposed tip of his tongue.

"So that's the way it is!" he said. "What have you been doing now?"

"I haven't been doing anything. But there are some things I might want to do. And petrol is a dreadful price."

The mention of petrol was a bad break.

"Oh, the car is it?" he said jealously. Kindness hated Tinny. "If it's the car you want it for, why don't you ask Hart?"

"Oh, I couldn't." Erica was almost shocked. "Hart is quite new." Hart being a newcomer with only eleven years' service. Kindness looked mollified.

"It isn't anything shady," she assured him. "I would have got it from Father at dinner tonight; the money, I mean; but he has gone to Uncle William's for the night. And women are so inquisitive," she added after a pause.

This, which could only refer to Nannie, made up the ground she had lost over the petrol. Kindness hated Nannie.

"Ten pounds is a big bit out of my coffin," he said with a sideways jerk of the head.

"You won't need it before Saturday. I have eight pounds in the bank, but I don't want to waste time tomorrow morning going into Westover for it. Time is awfully precious just now. If anything happens to me, you're sure of eight pounds anyhow. And Father is good for the other two."

"And what made you come to Kindness?"

There was complacence in the tone, and anyone but Erica would have said: because you are my oldest friend, because you have always helped me out of difficulties since I was three years old and first put my legs astride a pony, because you can keep my counsel and yours, because in spite of your cantankerousness you are an old darling.

But Erica said, "I just thought how much handier tea caddies were than banks."

"What's that!"

"Oh, perhaps I shouldn't have said that. Your wife told me about that, one day I was having tea with her. It wasn't her fault, really. I saw the notes peering through the tea. A bit germy, I thought. For the tea, I mean. But an awfully good idea." As Kindness was still speechless. "Boiling water kills most things, anyhow. Besides," she said, bringing up as support what she should have used for attack, "who else could I go to?"

She reached over and took the stub of pencil from him, turned over a handbill of the local gymkhana which was lying on the saddle-room table, and wrote in schoolgirl characters on the back:

I owe Bartholomew Kindness ten pounds. Erica Meir Burgoyne.

"That will do until Saturday," she said. "My checkbook is finished, anyhow."

"I don't like you frittering away my brass handles all over Kent," Kindness grumbled.

"I think brass handles are very showy," Erica said. "You'd do much better to have wrought iron."

As they went through the gardens together towards his cottage and the tea caddy, Erica said:

"About how many pawnbrokers are there in Kent?"

"'Bout two thousand."

"Oh, dear!" said Erica. And let the conversation lapse.

But the two thousand pawnbrokers slept with her that night, and leaped awake before her waking eyes.

Two thousand! My hat!

But of course Kindness was just guessing. He probably had never pawned anything in his life. How could he know in the very least how many pawnbrokers there were in a county? Still, there was bound to be quite a number. Even in a well-to-do county like Kent. She had never noticed even one. But she supposed you wouldn't notice one unless you happened to be looking for it. Like mushrooms.

It was half-past six of a hot, still morning as she backed Tinny out of the garage, and no one was awake in the bland white house that smiled at her as she went. Tinny made a noise at any time, but the noise she made in the before-breakfast silence of a summer morning was obscene. And for the first time Erica was guilty of disloyalty in her feeling for Tinny. Exasperated she had been often; yes, furious; but it had always been the fury of possession, the anger one feels for someone so loved as to be part of oneself. Never in her indignation, never in the moments of her friends' laughter, had she ever been tempted to disown Tinny. Still less to give her up.

But now she thought quite calmly, I shall really have to get a new car.

Erica was growing up.

Tinny expostulated her way through the quiet shining lanes, chuffing, snorting, and shaking, while Erica sat upright in the old-fashioned seat and ceased to think about her. Beside her was a box containing half a spring chicken, bread and butter, tomatoes, shortbread, and a bottle of milk. This—"Miss Erica's lunch"—was the Steynes housekeeper's unwitting contribution to the confounding of the Law. Beyond it, in a brown paper parcel, was Erica's own subscription—a less delicate but more filling one than the housekeeper's-purchased at Mr.-Deeds-in-the-village. ("Eastindiaman and provision Merchant. All the Best in Season.") Mr. Deeds had provided pink and shining slices of jellied veal ("Do you really want it as thick as that, Miss Erica?") but he had not been able to supply a brand of chocolates with raisins in it. No demand for that, there wasn't.

It had not even crossed Erica's mind that she was tired, that there remained less than an hour before closing time, and that a starving man might just as well have good solid lumps of plain chocolate as be indulged in his light preference for raisins. No; Erica—although she could not have told you about it—knew all about the importance of little things. Especially the importance of little things when one was unhappy. In the hot and dusty evening she had toured the neighboring villages with a determination that grew with her lack of success. So that now, in the torn and gaping pocket of Tinny's near door, lay four halfpound slabs of chocolate with raisins in it, the whole stock of Mrs.-Higgs-at-Leytham, who at a quarter past seven had been persuaded to leave her high tea ("only for you I'd do it, Miss Burgoyne, not for another soul") and turn the enormous key in her small blistered door.

It was after seven before she had clamored her way through sleeping Mallingford and entered the hot, shadeless country beyond. As she turned into the long straight of the chalky lane where her quick country-trained eyes had noticed that boot yesterday, she wished that Tisdall might have better cover than those gorse bushes. Not cover from the Law, but cover from the sky there was going to be at midday. A blazing day, it was going to be. Tisdall would need all of that bottle of milk and those tomatoes. She debated whether or not it would be a good move to transport the fugitive to other climes. Over to Charing, for instance. There were woods enough there to house an army in safety from sun and law. But Erica had never much liked woods, and had never felt particularly safe in one. It was better to be hot in gorse bushes and be able to see a long way away, than have strangers stumbling over you in the cool of thick trees. Besides, the Tisdall man might refuse the offer of a lift.

There is no doubt as to what the Tisdall man's answer would have been, but the proposition was never put to him. Either he was so dead asleep that not even the uproar of Tinny's advent could rouse him, or he was no longer in that piece of country. Erica went to the end of the mile-long straight, Tinny full out and making a noise like an express train, and came back to the spot where she had stopped yesterday. As she shut off the engine, the silence fell about her, absolute. Not even a lark sang, not a shadow stirred.

She waited there, quietly, not looking about her, her arms propped on the wheel in the attitude of one considering her future movements. There must be no expectancy in her appearance to arouse suspicion in the mind of stray countrymen. For twenty minutes she sat, relaxed and incurious. Then she stretched herself, made sure during the stretch that the lane was still unoccupied, and got out. If Tisdall had wanted to speak to her, he would have reached her before now. She took the two parcels and the chocolate and cached them where Tisdall had been lying yesterday. To these she added a packet of cigarettes produced from her own sagging pocket. Erica did not smoke herself—she had tried it, of course, had not much liked it, and with the logic that was her ruling characteristic had not persisted—and she did not know that Tisdall smoked. These, and the matches, were just "in case." Erica never did a job that was not thorough.

She climbed in again, pressed Tinny into life, and without a pause or backward glance headed down the lane, her face and thoughts turned to the far-off coast and Dymchurch.

It was Erica's very sound theory that no "local" had stolen that coat. She had lived all her life in a country community, and knew very well that a new black overcoat cannot make its appearance even on the meanest back without receiving a truly remarkable amount of attention. She knew, too, that your countryman is not versed in the ways of pawnshops, and that a coat lying in a car would not represent to him a possible cash value, as it would to someone "on the road." If he coveted it at all, it would be for possession; and the difficulty of explaining its appearance would result in his leaving it where it was. The coat, therefore, according to Erica's reasoning, had been taken by a "casual."

This made things at once easier and more difficult. A "casual" is a much more noticeable person than a "local," and so easier to identify. On the other hand, a "casual" is a movable object and difficult to track. In the week that had passed since the theft, that coat might have traversed most of Kent. It might now be-

Hunger gave wings to Erica's imagination. By the time she was in sight of Dymchurch she had, thanks to modern methods of hitchhiking and old-fashioned methods of stowing away, placed the coat on the back of a clerk in the office of the Mayor of Bordeaux. He was a little pale clerk with a delicate wife and puny baby, and Erica's heart was sore at the thought of having to take the coat from him, even for Tisdall.

At this point Erica decided that she must eat. Fasting was good for the imagination but bad for logic. She stepped on the brake at sight of The Rising Sun, "good pull-up for car men, open all night." It was a tin shed, set down by the roadside with the inconsequence of a matchbox, painted gamboge and violet, and set about with geraniums. The door was hospitably open, and the sound of voices floated out on the warm air.

In the tiny interior were two very large men. The proprietor was cutting very large slices from a very fresh loaf, and the other man was sipping very hot liquid from a very large mug with very great noise. At sight of Erica on the doorstep all these activities ceased abruptly.

- "Good morning," said Erica into the silence.
- "Morning, miss," said the proprietor. "Cup of tea, perhaps?"
- "Well—" Erica looked around. "You haven't any bacon, by any chance?"
- "Lovely bacon," said the owner promptly. "Melt in your mouth." "I'll have a lot," said Erica happily.
- "Egg with it, perhaps?"

"Three," said Erica.

The owner craned his neck to see out the door, and found that she really was alone.

"Come," he said. "That's something like. Nice to see a young girl that can appreciate her vittles these days. Have a seat, miss." He dusted an iron chair for her with the corner of his apron. "Bacon be ready in no time. Thick or thin?"

"Thick, please. Good morning." This to the other man, in more particular greeting, as she sat down and so definitely became a partner in this business of eating and drinking. "Is that your lorry out there? I have always wanted to drive one of those."

"Ye'? I've always wanted to be a tightrope walker."

"You're the wrong build," said Erica seriously. "Better stick to lorry driving." And the owner paused in his slicing of the bacon to laugh.

The lorry driver decided that sarcasm was wasted on so literal a mind. He relaxed into amiability.

"Oh, well; nice to have ladies' company for a change, eh, Bill?"

"Don't you have lots of it?" asked Erica. "I thought lorries were very popular." And before the astounded man could make up his mind whether this skinny child was being rude, provocative, or merely matter-of-fact, she went on, "Do you give lifts to tramps, ever, by the way?"

"Never!" said the driver promptly, glad to feel his feet on firm ground.

"That's a pity. I'm interested in tramps."

"Christian interest?" inquired Bill, turning the sizzling bacon in the pan.

"No. Literary."

"Well, now. You writing a book?"

"Not exactly. I'm gathering material for someone else. You must see a lot of tramps, even if you don't give them lifts," she persisted, to the driver.

"No time to see anyone when you're driving that there."

"Tell her about Harrogate Harry," prompted Bill, breaking eggs. "I saw him in your cab last week sometime."

"Never saw anyone in my cab, you didn't."

"Oh, come unstuck, will you. The little lady's all right. She's not the sort to go blabbing even if you did give an odd tramp a, turning lift."

"Harrogate isn't a tramp."

"Who is he, then?" asked Erica.

"He's a china merchant. Traveling."

"Oh, I know. A blue-and-white bowl in exchange for a rabbit skin."

"No. Nothing like that. Mends teapot handles and such."

"Oh. Does he make much?" This for the sake of keeping the driver on the subject.

"Enough to be going on with. And he cadges an old coat or a pair of boots now and then."

Erica said nothing for a moment, and she wondered if the thumping of her heart was as audible to these two men as it was in her ears. An old coat, now and then. What should she say now? She could not say: Did he have a coat the day you saw him? That would be a complete giveaway.

"He sounds interesting," she said, at last. "Mustard, please," to Bill. "I should like to meet him. But I suppose he is at the other end of the country by now. What day did you see him?"

"Lemme see. I picked him up outside Dymchurch and dropped him near Tonbridge. That was a week last Monday."

So it hadn't been Harrogate. What a pity! He had sounded so hopeful a subject, with his desire for coats and boots, his wandering ways, and his friendliness with lorry drivers who get a man away quickly from possibly unfriendly territory. Oh, well, it was no good imagining that it was going to be as easy as this had promised to be.

Bill set down the mustard by her plate. "Not Monday," he said. "Not that it makes any difference. But Jimmy was here unloading stores when you went by. Tuesday, it was."

Not that it made any difference! Erica took a great mouthful of eggs and bacon to quiet her singing heart.

For a little there was silence in The Rising Sun; partly because Erica had a masculine habit of silence while she ate, partly because she had not yet made up her mind what it would be both politic and productive to say next. She was startled into anxiety when the lorry driver thrust his mug away from him and rose to go.

"But you haven't told me about Harrogate What's-His-Name!"

"What is there to tell?"

"Well, a traveling china-mender must be chock full of interest. I would like to meet him and have a talk."

"He isn't much of a talker."

"I'd make it worth his while."

Bill laughed, "If you was to give Harrogate five bob, he'd talk his head off. And for ten he'll tell you how he found the south pole."

Erica turned to the more sympathetic one of the two.

"You know him? Does he have a home, do you know?"

"In winter he stays put, mostly, I think. But in summer he lives in a tent."

"Living with Queenie Webster somewhere near Pembury," put in the driver, who didn't like the shift of interest to Bill.

He put down some coppers on the scrubbed table and moved to the door.

"And if you're making it worth anyone's while, I'd square Queenie first if I was you."

"Thank you," said Erica. "I'll remember. Thank you for your help."

The genuine warmth of gratitude in her voice made him pause. He stood in the doorway considering her. "Tramps are a queer taste for a girl with a healthy appetite," he said, and went out to his lorry.

Erica's healthy appetite extended to bread and marmalade and several cups of tea, but she absorbed little information with the nourishment. Bill, for all his willingness to give her anything she wanted, knew very little about Harrogate Harry. She had now to decide whether or not to leave a "warm" Dymchurch and follow the unknown and elusive Harry into the "cold" of the Tonbridge country.

"Are most tramps honest, would you say?" she asked as she was paying her bill.

"We—11," said Bill, thinking it out, "honest up to the point of opportunity, if you know what I mean."

Erica knew. Not one tramp in fifty would refuse the gift of a coat lying unattended. And Harrogate Harry definitely liked to acquire coats and boots. And Harry had been in Dymchurch a week last Tuesday. Her job, therefore, was to follow the chinamender through the summer landscape until she caught up with him. If night overtook her in her search she must think of some really reassuring lie which could be telephoned to her father at Steynes to account for her absence. The need for lying caused her the first pang she had suffered so far in her self-appointed crusade; she had never needed to shut out her father from any ploy of hers. For the second time in a few hours her loyalty was divided. She had not noticed her disloyalty to Tinny; but this time she noticed and cared.

Oh, well, the day was young, and days just now were long. And Tinny might be a veteran but she was never sick or sorry. If luck held as it had begun she might still be back in her own bed at Steynes tonight. Back at Steynes—with the coat!

Her breath stopped at the very prospect.

She said good-bye to the admiring Bill, promised to recommend his breakfasts to all her friends, and set Tinny's nose west and north through the hot flowery country. The roads were blinding now in the glare of the sky, the horizons beginning to swim. Tinny sweltered stoutly through the green furnace, and was soon as comfortable as a frying pan. In spite of her eagerness Erica was forced every few miles to pause and open both doors while Tinny cooled. Yes, she really must get another car.

Near Kippings Cross, on the main Tonbridge road, she repeated as tactics what she had by accident found serviceable: she pulled up for lunch at a wayside hut. But this time luck was lacking in the service. The hut was kept by a jolly woman with a flow of conversation but no interest in tramps. She had all the normal woman's intolerance of a waster, and "didn't encourage vagrants." Erica ate sparingly and drank her bottled coffee, glad of the temporary shade; but presently she rose and went out to find a "better place." The "better" referring not to food but to possible information. With a self-control beyond praise she turned her eyes away from the endless tea gardens, green and cool, with gay cloths gleaming like wet stones in the shadows. Not for her that luxury today. Tea gardens knew nothing of tramps.

She turned down a lane to Goudhurst, and sought an inn. Inns had always china to mend, and now that she was in Harrogate's home country, so to speak, she would surely find someone who knew him.

She ate cold underdone beef and green salad in a room as beautiful as any at Steynes, and prayed that one, at least, of the dishes on her table, should be cracked. When the tinned fruit appeared in a broken china rose-bowl she nearly whooped aloud.

Yes, the waitress agreed, it was a pretty bowl. She didn't know if it was valuable or not, she was only there for the season (it being understood that the possible value of household goods could not interest anyone whose playground was the world). Yes, she supposed that someone local mended their china but she didn't know. Yes, she *could* ask, of course.

The landlord, asked who had mended the china bowl so beautifully, said that that particular bowl was bought just as it was, in a job lot of stuff over at Matfield Green. And anyhow it was so old a mend that the man that did it was probably dead by now. But if Erica wanted a man to mend her china, there was a good traveling man who came around now and then. Palmer, by name. He could put fifty pieces together when he was sober without showing a join. But you'd got to be sure he was sober.

Erica listened to the vices and virtues of Palmer, and asked if he was the only one in the district.

The only one the landlord knew. But you couldn't find a better than Harry.

"Harry?"

That was his name. Harrogate Harry they called him. No, the landlord did not know where he was to be found. Lived in a tent Brenchley way, so he understood. Not the kind of household that Erica had better visit alone, he thought he had better say. Harry was no example as a citizen.

Erica went out into the heat encouraged by the news that for days, sometimes weeks, together, Harry did not stir away from his temporary home. As soon as he made a little extra money, he sat back and drank it.

Well, if one is going to interview a china-mender one's first necessity is broken china. Erica drove into Tunbridge Wells, hoping that the great-aunt who lived somberly in Calverly Park was sleeping off her forbidden pastry and not promenading under the lime trees, and in an antique shop spent some of Kindness's coffin money on a frivolous little porcelain figure of a dancer. She drove back to Pembury and in the afternoon quiet of a deep lane proceeded to drop the dancer with abandon on the running board of the car. But the dancer was tough. Even when Erica took her firmly by the feet and tapped her on the jamb of the door, she remained whole. In the end, afraid that greater violence might shatter her completely, she snapped off an arm with her finger and thumb, and there was her passport to Harrogate Harry.

You cannot ask questions about a vague tramp who, you think, may have stolen a coat. But to look for a china-mender is quite a legitimate search, involving no surprise or suspicion in the minds of the questioned. It took Erica only ninety minutes to come

face-to-face with Harrogate. It would have taken her less, but the tent was a long way from any made road; first up a cart track through woods, a track impassable even for the versatile Tinny, then across an open piece of gorse land with far views of the Medway valley, and into a second wood to a clearing at its further edge, where a stream ran down to a dark pool.

Erica wished that the tent had not been in a wood. From her earliest childhood she had been fearless by nature (the kind of child of whom older people say out hunting: not a nerve in her body), but there was no denying that she didn't like woods. She liked to see a long way away. And though the stream ran bright and clear and merry in the sunlight, the pool in the hollow was still and deep and forbidding. One of those sudden, secret cups of black water more common in Sussex than in Kent.

As she came across the clearing carrying the little dancer in her hand, a dog rushed out at her, shattering the quiet with hysterical protest. And at the noise a woman came to the tent door and stood there watching Erica as she came. She was a very tall woman, broad-shouldered and straight, and Erica had the mad feeling that this long approach to her over an open floor should end in a curtsey.

"Good afternoon," she called, cheerfully, above the clamor of the dog. But the woman waited without moving. "I have a piece of china—can't you make that dog be quiet?" She was face-to-face with her now, only the noise of the dog between them.

The woman lifted a foot to the animal's ribs, and the high yelling died into silence. The murmur of the stream came back. Erica showed the broken porcelain figure.

"Harry!" called the woman, her black inquisitive eyes not leaving Erica. And Harry came to the tent door: a small weaselish man with bloodshot eyes, and evidently in the worst of tempers. "A job for you."

"I'm not working," said Harry, and spat.

"Oh. I'm sorry. I heard you were very good at mending things."

The woman took the figure and broken piece from Erica's hands. "He's working, all right," she said.

Harry spat again, and took the pieces. "Have you the money to pay?" he asked, angrily.

"How much will it be?"

"Two shillings."

"Two and six," said the woman.

"Oh, yes, I have that much."

He went back into the tent, and the woman stood in the way so that Erica could neither follow nor see. Unconsciously she had, in imagining this moment, always placed herself inside the tent—with the coat folded up in the corner. Now she was not even to be allowed to see inside.

"He won't be long," Queenie said. "By the time you've cut a whistle from the ash tree, it'll be ready."

Erica's small sober face broke into one of its rare smiles. "You thought I couldn't do that, didn't you?" For the woman's phrase had been a flick in the face of a supposed town dweller.

She cut the wood with her pocketknife, shaped it, nicked it, and damped it in the stream, hoping that a preoccupation might disarm Queenie and her partner. She even hoped that the last processes of whistle manufacture might be made in friendly company with the mending of china. But the moment she moved back to the tent, Queenie came from her desultory stick gathering in the wood to stand guard. And Erica found her whistle finished and the mended figure in her hands, without being one whit wiser or richer than she was when she left the car in the road. She could have cried.

She produced her small purse (Erica hated a bag) and paid her half crown, and the sight of the folded notes in the little back partition all waiting to do their work of rescue, drove her to desperation. Without any warning and without knowing she was going to say it, she asked the man:

"What did you do with the coat you took at Dymchurch?"

There was a moment of complete stillness, and Erica rushed on:

"I don't want to do anything about it. Prosecuting, or anything like that, I mean. But I do want that coat awfully bad. I'll buy it back from you if you still have it. Or if you've pawned it—"

"You're a nice one!" the man burst out. "Coming here to have a job of work done and then accusing a man of battle and blue murder. You be out of here before I lose my temper good and proper and crack you one on the side of the jaw. Impudent little —with your loose tongue. I've a good mind to twist it out of your bloody head, and what's more I—"

The woman pushed him aside and stood over Erica, tall and intimidating.

"What makes you think my man took a coat?"

"The coat he had when Jake, the lorry driver, gave him a lift a week last Tuesday was taken from a car at Dymchurch. We know that." She hoped the "we" sounded well. And she hoped she didn't sound as doubtful as she felt. They were both very innocent and indignant-looking. "But it isn't a matter of making a case. We only want the coat back. I'll give you a pound for it," she added, as they were about to break in on her again.

She saw their eyes change. And in spite of her predicament a great relief flooded her. The man was the man. They knew what coat she was talking about.

"And if you've pawned it, I'll give you ten shillings to tell me where."

"What do you get out of this?" the woman said. "What do you want with a man's coat?"

"I didn't say anything about it being a man's." Triumph ran through her like an electric shock.

"Oh, never mind!" Queenie dismissed with rough impatience any further pretense. "What is it to you?"

If she mentioned murder they would both panic, and deny with their last breath any knowledge of the coat. She knew well, thanks to her father's monologues, the petty offender's horror of major crime. They would go to almost any lengths to avoid being mixed up, even remotely, in a capital charge.

"It's to get Hart out of trouble," she said. "He shouldn't have left the car unattended. The owner is coming back tomorrow, and if the coat isn't found by then Hart will lose his job."

"Who's Art?" asked the woman. "Your brother?"

"No. Our chauffeur."

"Chauffeur!" Harry gave a high skirl of laughter that had little amusement in it. "That's a good one. I suppose you have two Rolls-Royces and five Bentleys." His little red eyes ran over her worn and outgrown clothes.

"No. Just a Lanchester and my old Morris." As their disbelief penetrated: "My name is Erica Burgoyne. My father is Chief Constable."

"Ye'? My name is John D. Rockefeller, and my father was the Duke of Wellington."

Erica whipped up her short tweed skirt, gripped the elastic waistband of the gym knickers she wore summer and winter, and pushed the inner side of it towards him on an extended thumb.

"Can you read?" she said.

"Erica M. Burgoyne" read the astonished man, in red on a Cash's label.

"It's a great mistake to be too skeptical," she said, letting the elastic snap back into place.

"So you're doing it for a chauffeur, eh?" Harry leered at her, trying to get back his lost ground. "You're very concerned about a chauffeur, aren't you?"

"I'm desperately in love with him," Erica said, in the tone in which one says: "And a box of matches, please." At school theatricals Erica had always had charge of the curtains.

But it passed. Their minds were too full of speculation to be concerned with emotion.

"How much?" said the woman. "For the coat?"

"No. For telling you where to find it."

"I told you, I'll give you ten shillings."

"Not enough."

"But how do I know you'll tell me the truth?"

"How do we know you're telling the truth?"

"All right, I'll give you a pound. I shall still have to buy it from the pawnshop, you know."

"It isn't in a pawnshop," the man said. "I sold it to a stone-breaker.'

"W-h-a-t!" cried Erica in a despairing wail. "Do I have to begin looking for someone else?"

"Oh, no need to look, no need at all. You hand over the cash, and I'll tell you where to find the bloke."

Erica took out a pound note and showed it to him. "Well?"

"He's working at the Five Wents crossroad, Paddock Wood way. And if he ain't there, he lives in a cottage in Capel. Near the church."

Erica held out the note. But the woman had seen the contents of the purse.

"Wait, Harry! She'll pay more." She moved between Erica and the path through the wood.

"I won't give you a penny more," Erica said incisively. Indignation overcame her awareness of the black pool, the silence, and her dislike of woods. "That's cheating."

The woman grabbed at her purse; but Erica had played lacrosse for her school only last winter. Queenie's eager hand, to her great astonishment, met not the purse but Erica's other arm, and came up and hit her own face with surprising violence. And Erica was around her stately bulk and running across the clearing, as she had swerved and run, half-bored, half-pleased, through many winter afternoons.

She heard them come after her, and wondered what they would do to her if they caught up with her. She wasn't afraid of the woman, but the man was small and light, and for all his drinking might be speedy. And he knew the path. In the shade of the trees, after the bright sunlight, she could hardly see a path at all. She wished she had said that someone was waiting for her in the car. It would have been-

Her foot caught in a root, and she rolled over and over.

She heard him coming thudding down the soft path, and as she sat up his face appeared, as if it were swimming towards her, above the undergrowth. In a few seconds he would be on her. She had fallen heavily because she was still clutching something in either hand. She looked to see what she was holding. In one hand was the china figure; in the other her purse and—the whistle.

The whistle! She put it to her mouth and blew a sort of tattoo. Long and short, like a code. A signal.

At the sound the man stopped, only a few yards from her, doubtfully.

"Hart!" she called with all the force of her very good lungs. "Hart!" And whistled again.

"All right," said the man, "all right! You can have your—Hart. Someday I'll tell your pa what's going on around his house. And I'll bet you pay me more than a few quid then, me lady!"

"Good-bye," said Erica. "Thank your wife from me for the whistle."

And of course, what *you* want, Inspector, is a rest. A little relaxation." The Chief Constable heaved himself into his raincoat. "Overworking yourself disgracefully. That never got a man anywhere. Except into his grave. Here it is Friday, and I dare swear you haven't had a night's sleep or a proper meal this week. Ridiculous! Mustn't take the thing to heart like that. Criminals have escaped before and will escape again."

"Not from me."

"Overdue, then. That's all I can say. Very overdue. Everyone makes mistakes. Who was to think a door in a bedroom was a fire escape, anyhow?"

"I should have looked in the cupboards."

"Oh, my dear good sir-!"

"The first one opened towards me, so that I could see inside. And by the time he came to the second he had lulled me into—"

"I told you you were losing your sense of proportion! If you don't get away for a little, you'll be seeing cupboards everywhere. You'll be what your Sergeant Williams calls 'falling down on the job.' You are coming back to dinner with me. You needn't 'but' me! It's only twenty miles."

"But meanwhile something may—"

"We have a telephone. Erica said I was to bring you. Said something about ordering ices specially. You fond of ices? Anyhow, she said she had something to show you."

"Puppies?" Grant smiled.

"Don't know. Probably. Never a moment in the year, it seems to me, when there isn't a litter of sort at Steynes. Here is your excellent substitute. Good evening, Sergeant."

"Good evening, sir," said Williams, rosily pink from his high tea.

"I'm taking Inspector Grant home to dinner with me."

"Very glad, sir. It'll do the Inspector good to eat a proper meal."

"That's my telephone number, in case you want him."

Grant's smile broadened as he watched the spirit that won the empire in full blast. He was very tired. The week had been a long purgatory. The thought of sitting down to a meal in a quiet room among leisured people was like regaining some happier sphere of existence that he had known a long time ago and half-forgotten about. Automatically he put together the papers on the desk.

"To quote one of Sergeant Williams's favorite sayings: 'As a detective I'm a grand farmer.' Thank you, I'd like to come to dinner. Kind of Miss Erica to think of me." He reached for his hat.

"Thinks a lot of you, Erica. Not impressionable as a rule. But you are the big chief, it seems."

"I have a picturesque rival, I'm afraid."

"Oh, yes. Olympia. I remember. I don't know much about bringing up children, you know, Grant," he said as they went out to the car. "Erica's my only one. Her mother died when she was born, and I made her a sort of companion instead of letting her grow up in the nursery. Her old nurse and I were always having words about it. Great stickler for the *comme il faut* and all that, Nannie. Then she went to school. Must find your own level, that's all education is: learning to deal with people. She didn't like it, but she stuck it. A good plucked 'un, she is."

"I think she is a charming child," Grant said heartily, answering the "justifying" tone and the Colonel's worried look.

"That's just it, Grant, that's just it! She isn't a child any longer. She should be coming out. Going to dances. Staying with her aunts in town and meeting people. But she doesn't want to. Just stays at home and runs wild. Doesn't care for clothes or pretties or any of the things she should care about at her age. She's seventeen, you know. It worries me. She's taken to gadding about all over the place in that little car of hers. I don't know where she has been half the time. Not that she doesn't tell me if I ask. Always a truthful child. But it worries me."

"I don't think it need, sir. She'll make her own happiness. You'll see. It's rare to meet anyone of that age who has so sure a knowledge of what she wants."

"Hrrmp!" said the Colonel. "And gets it! George will be there for dinner," he added. "George Meir. Cousin of my wife's. Perhaps you know him? Nerve specialist."

"I know him well by reputation, but I've never met him."

"That's Erica's doing. Nice fellow, George, but a bit of a bore. Don't understand what he's talking about half the time. Reactions, and things. But Erica seems to understand the lingo. Good shot, though: George. Nice fellow.

Sir George was a nice fellow. Grant liked him at sight, and noticing his narrow cheekbones, felt that some other attribute in him must weigh very strongly with Erica to overcome his physical characteristics. He was certainly a pleasant person, with neither the slight flamboyance nor the condescension so common in Wimpole Street. That he could commiserate with Grant on his nonsuccess without making Grant want to hit him, was a test of his worth. Grant, in fact, turned to him in his sore state, as to someone who would understand. This was a man to whom human failure must be a very ordinary affair.

Colonel Burgoyne had forbidden mention of the Clay affair during dinner, but he might as well have bidden the tides cease.

They were all talking Tisdall, Colonel included, before the fish had disappeared. All but Erica, who sat at the end of the table in her demure school-supper white dress, listening quietly. She had powdered her nose, but looked no more grown up than she did by day.

"We never picked up his trail at all," Grant said in answer to a question of Meir. "He just disappeared from the moment he left the hotel. Oh, there were dozens of accounts of men like him, of course. But they all led to nothing. We don't know a thing more than we did last Monday. He might have been sleeping out, the first three nights. But you know what last night was like. Torrents. Not even an animal could have stayed out in it. He must have found shelter somewhere, if he's still alive. It wasn't local, the storm. There are floods from here to the Tyne. And yet another whole day has gone past and not a hint of him."

"No chance of his escaping by sea?"

"Not likely. Curiously enough, not one criminal in a thousand escapes that way."

"So much for our island race!" laughed Meir. "The sea's the last thing they think of. You know, Inspector, I don't know if you know it, but you have made the man very vivid in the half hour we've been talking. And there's something else you've made clear, I think; something you probably are not aware of yourself."

"What is that?"

"You were surprised in your heart of hearts that he had done it. Perhaps even sorry. You hadn't believed it."

"Yes, I think that's true. You'd have been sorry yourself, Sir George," Grant grinned. "He's very plausible. And he stuck to truth as far as it served him. As I told you, we've checked his statement from beginning to end. It's true as far as it can be checked. But that thin story about stealing the car! And losing his coat—the all-important coat!"

"Curiously enough, I don't think the stealing episode is as incredible as it sounds. His main thought for the past few weeks had been escape. Escape from the disgrace of his spent fortune, from the crowd (whom he seems to have begun to value at their proper worth), from the necessity of earning his living again (tramping was just as mad a notion, in the case of a boy with influential connections, as stealing a car: the escape motif again), and latterly escape from the equivocal situation at the cottage. He must have looked forward, you know, with subconscious dread to the leave-taking that was due in a day or two. He was in a highly emotional condition due to his self-disgust and self-questioning (at bottom what he wanted to escape from was himself). At a moment of low vitality (six in the morning) he is presented with the means of physical escape. A deserted countryside and abandoned car. He is possessed for the time being. When he recovers he is horrified, just as he says. He turns the car without having to think twice, and comes back at the best speed he can make. To his dying day he'll never understand what made him steal the car."

"Stealing will pretty soon not be a crime at all, what with all you specialists," the Colonel remarked with a sort of tart resignation.

"Not a bad theory, sir," Grant said to Meir. "Can you make the thin tale about the coat thicker too?"

"Truth is often terribly thin, don't you think?"

"Are you taking the view that the man may be innocent?"

"I had thought of it."

"Why?"

"I have an excellent opinion of your judgment."

"My judgment?"

"Yes. You were surprised the man had done it. That means that your first impression was clouded by circumstantial evidence."

"In fact, I'm logical as well as imaginative. Mercifully, since I'm a police officer. The evidence may be circumstantial but it is very satisfying and neat."

"Much too neat, don't you feel?"

"Lord Edward said that. But no policeman feels that evidence is too neat, Sir George."

"Poor Champneis!" the Colonel said. "Dreadful for him. Very devoted they were, I'm told. A nice fellow. Didn't know him, but knew the family in my young days. Nice people. Dreadful for them!"

"I traveled up from Dover with him on Thursday," Meir said. "I had come over from Calais—I've just come back from a medical conference in Vienna—and he joined the boat train with the usual Champneis lordliness at Dover. He seemed very happy to be back. Showed me some topazes he had brought from Galeria for his wife. They corresponded every day by telegram, it seemed. I found that more impressive than the topazes, if I must be frank. European telegrams being what they are."

"Just a moment, Sir George. Do you mean that Champneis hadn't come over on the boat from Calais?"

"No, oh, no. He came home by yacht. The *Petronel*. It belongs to his elder brother, but he lent it to Edward for the voyage back from Galeria. A charming little ship. She was lying in the harbor."

"Then when had Lord Edward arrived in Dover?"

"The night before, I believe. Too late to go up to town." He paused and looked quizzically at Grant. "Neither logic nor imagination will make Edward Champneis suspect."

"I realize that." Grant went on calmly to prise the stone from a peach, an operation he had suspended abruptly at Meir's phrase about Champneis joining the boat train. "It is of no importance. The police habit of checking up."

But his mind was full of surprise and conjecture. Champneis had distinctly let him understand that he had crossed from Calais on Thursday morning. Not in words but by implication. Grant had made some idle remark, something about the accommodation in the new steamers, and Champneis in his reply had implied that he had been on board that morning. Why? Edward Champneis was in Dover on Wednesday night, and was reluctant to have the fact known. Why? In the name of all that was logical, why?

Because an awkward pause had succeeded the revelation of Champneis's presence in England, Grant said lightly, "Miss Erica hasn't produced the puppies, or whatever it was I was to be shown."

To everyone's surprise Erica grew pink. This was so unheard-of a happening that all three men stared.

"It isn't puppies," she said. "It's something you wanted very much. But I'm terribly afraid you're not going to be happy about it."

"It sounds exciting," admitted Grant, wondering what the child had imagined he wanted. He hoped she hadn't brought him something. Hero worship was all very well, but it was embarrassing to be given something in full view of the multitude. "Where is it?"

"It's in a parcel up in my room. I thought I'd wait till you had finished your port."

"Is it something you can bring into a dining room?" her father asked.

"Oh, yes."

"Then Burt will fetch it."

"Oh, no!" she cried, arresting her father's hand on the bell. "I'll get it. I shan't be a minute."

She came back carrying a large brown paper parcel, which her father said looked like a Salvation Army gift day. She unwrapped it and produced a man's coat, of a grayish black.

"That is the coat you wanted," she said. "But it has all its buttons."

Grant took the coat automatically, and examined it.

"Where in Heaven's name did you get that, Erica?" her father asked, astonished.

"I bought it for ten shillings from a stone breaker at Paddock Wood. He gave a tramp five shillings for it, and thought it such a bargain that he didn't want to part with it. I had to have cold tea with him, and listen to what the Border Regiment did on the first of July, and see the bullet scar on his shin, before he would give up the coat. I was afraid to go away and leave him with it in case he sold it to someone else, or I couldn't find him again."

"What makes you think this is Tisdall's coat?" Grant asked.

"This," she said, and showed the cigarette burn. "He told me to look for that."

"Who did?"

"Mr. Tisdall!"

"Who?" said all three men at once.

"I met him by accident on Wednesday. And since then I've been searching for the coat. But it was great luck coming across it."

"You met him! Where?"

"In a lane near Mallingford."

"And you didn't report it?" Grant's voice was stern.

"No." Hers quavered just a little, and then went on equably. "You see, I didn't believe he had done it. And I really do like you a lot. I thought it would be better for you if he could be proved innocent before he was really arrested. Then you wouldn't have to set him free again. The papers would be awful about that."

There was a stunned silence for a moment.

Then Grant said, "And on Wednesday Tisdall told you to look for this." He held forward the burned piece, while the others crowded from their places to inspect.

"No sign of a replaced button," Meir observed. "Do you think it's the coat?"

"It may be. We can't try it on Tisdall, but perhaps Mrs. Pitts may be able to identify it."

"But—but," stammered the Colonel—"if it is the coat do you realize what it means?"

"Completely. It means beginning all over again."

His tired eyes, cold with disappointment, met Erica's kind gray ones, but he refused their sympathy. It was too early to think of Erica as his possible savior. At the moment she was just someone who had thrown a wrench into the machinery.

"I shall have to get back," he said. "May I use your telephone?"

Mrs. Pitts identified the coat. She had dried it at the kitchen fire one day when a thermos bottle of hot water had leaked on it. She had noticed the cigarette burn then.

Sergeant Williams, interviewing the farmer who had identified Tisdall's car, found that he was color blind.

The truth stuck out with painful clarity. Tisdall had really lost his coat from the car on Tuesday. He had really driven away from the beach. He had not murdered Christine Clay.

By eleven that Friday evening Grant was faced with the fact that they were just where they were a week previously, when he had canceled a theater seat and come down to Westover. Worse still, they had hounded a man into flight and hiding, and they had wasted seven days on a dud investigation while the man they wanted made his escape.

Grant's mind was a welter of broken ends and unrelated facts.

Harmer. He came into the picture now, didn't he? They had checked his story as far as it went. He really had made inquiries from the owner of the cherry orchard, and from the post office at Liddlestone at the times he said. But after that, what? After that no one knew anything about his movements until he walked into the cottage at Medley, sometime after eight the next morning.

There was—incredibly!—Edward Champneis, who had brought back topazes for his wife, but who, for some reason, was unwilling that his movements on that Wednesday night should be investigated. There could be no other reason for his desire to make Grant believe that he had arrived in England on Thursday morning. He had not come to England secretly. If you want to arrive secretly in a country, arriving in a populous harbor by yacht is not the way to do it. Harbor master and customs' officials are a constitutionally inquisitive race. Therefore it was not the fact of his arrival that he wanted to hide, but the way in which he had occupied his time since. The more Grant thought about it, the queerer it became. Champneis was at Dover on Wednesday night. At six on Thursday morning his well-loved wife had met her death. And Champneis did not want his movements investigated. Very queer!

There was, too, the "shilling for candles." That, which had first caught his interest and had been put aside in favor of more obvious lines of inquiry, that would have to be looked into.

On Saturday morning the newspapers, beginning to be bored with a four-day-old manhunt, carried the glad news that the hunted man was innocent. "New information having come to police." It was confidently expected that Tisdall would present himself before nightfall, and in that hope reporters and photographers lingered around the County police station in Westover; with more optimism than logic, it would seem, since Tisdall was just as likely to present himself at a station miles away.

But Tisdall presented himself nowhere.

This caused a slight stirring of surprise in Grant's busy mind when he had a moment to remember Tisdall; but that was not often. He wondered why Tisdall hadn't enough sense to come in out of the wet. It had rained again on Friday night and it had been blowing a northeaster and raining all Saturday. One would have thought he would have been glad to see a police station. He was not being sheltered by any of his old friends, that was certain. They had all been shadowed very efficiently during the four days that he was "wanted." Grant concluded that Tisdall had not yet seen a newspaper, and dismissed the thing from his mind.

He had set the official machinery moving to discover the whereabouts of Christine Clay's brother; he had started a train of inquiries which had the object of proving that Jason Harmer had once had a dark coat which he had lately discarded and which had a missing button. And he himself took on the investigation of Lord Edward Champneis. He noticed with his usual self-awareness that he had no intention of going to Champneis and asking for an account of his movements on Wednesday night. It would be highly embarrassing, for one thing, if Champneis proved that he had slept peacefully in his bunk all night. Or at the Lord Warden. Or otherwise had a perfect alibi. For another—oh, well, there was no getting away from the fact; one didn't demand information from the son of a ducal house as one demanded it from a coster. A rotten world, no doubt, but one must conform.

Grant learned that the *Petronel* had gone around to Cowes, where her owner, Giles Champneis, would live in her for Cowes's week. On Sunday morning, therefore, Grant flew down to Gosport, and got a boat across the glittering Spithead to the island. What had been a white flurry of rain-whipped water yesterday was now a Mediterranean sea of the most beguiling blue. The English summer was being true to form.

Grant flung the Sunday papers on the seat beside him and prepared to enjoy the crossing. And then his eye caught the Sunday Newsreel's heading: THE TRUTH ABOUT CLAY'S EARLY LIFE. And once more the case drew him into it. On the previous Sabbath, the Sunday Wire had had as its chief "middle" a tear-compelling article by that prince of newspapermen, Jammy Hopkins. The article had consisted of an interview with a Nottingham lace-hand, Miss Helen Cozens, who had, it appeared, been a contemporary of Christine Clay's in the factory. It had dealt touchingly with Chris's devotion to her family, her sunny disposition, her excellent work, the number of times Miss Helen Cozens had helped her in one way or another, and it had finished with a real Hopkins touch of get-togetherness. It had been the fate of one of these two friends, he pointed out, to climb to the stars, to give pleasure to millions, to irradiate the world. But there were other fates as glowing if less spectacular; and Helen Cozens, in her little two-room home, looking after a delicate mother, had had a destiny no less wonderful, no less worthy

of the world's homage. It was a good article, and Jammy had been pleased with it.

Now the *Sunday Newsreel* appeared with an interview of its own. And it caused Grant the only smile he had enjoyed that week. Meg Hindler was the lady interviewed. Once a factory hand but now the mother of eight. And she wanted to know what the hell that goddamned old maid Nell Cozens thought she was talking about, and she hoped she might be struck down for her lies, and if her mother drank the lord knew it was no wonder with a nagging dyspeptic piece of acid like her daughter around, and everyone knew that Christina Gotobed was out of the factory and away from the town long before Nell Cozens put her crooked nose into the place at all.

It was not put just like that, but to anyone reading between the lines it was perfectly clear.

Meg really had known Christine. She was a quiet girl, she said, always trying to better herself. Not very popular with her contemporaries. Her father was dead and she lived with her mother and brother in a three-room tenement house. The brother was older, and was the mother's favorite. When Chris was seventeen the mother had died, and the family had disappeared from Nottingham. They did not belong to the town and had had no roots there, and no one had regretted them when they went. Least of all people who hadn't come into the town until years afterwards.

Grant wondered how Jammy would enjoy being taken for a ride by the imaginative Nell. So the elder brother had been the mother's favorite, had he? Grant wondered how much that meant. A shilling for candles. What family row had left such a mark that she should immortalize it in her will? Oh, well! Reporters thought they were clever, but the Yard had ways and means that were not open to the Press, however powerful. By the time he got back tonight, Christine Clay's early life would be on his desk in full detail. He discarded the *Wire* and turned to the other papers in the bundle. The *Sunday Telegraph* had a symposium—a very dignified and conveniently cheap method of filling a page. Everyone from the Archbishop of Canterbury to Jason Harmer had given their personal view of Christine Clay and her influence on her art. (The *Sunday Telegraph* liked influence and art. Even boxers never described punches to it: they explained their art.) The silly little paragraphs were all conventional, except Jason's, which had a violent sincerity beneath its sickly phrases. Marta Hallard was graceful about Clay's genius, and for once omitted to condone her lowly origin. The heir to a European throne extolled her beauty. A flying ace her courage. An ambassador her wit. It must have cost the *Telegraph* something in telephones.

Grant turned to the *Courier*, and found Miss Lydia Keats being informative all over the middle pages on the signs of the Zodiac. Lydia's stock had dropped a little in her own circles during the last week. It was felt that if she had foreseen the Clay end so clearly it was a little weak of her to overlook a small detail like murder. But in the public eye she was booming. There was no fraud about Lydia. She had stated in public, many months ago, what the stars foretold for Christine Clay, and the stars were right. And if there is anything the public loves it is a prophecy come true. They pushed their shuddering spines more firmly into the cushions and asked for more. And Lydia was giving it to them. In small type at the end of the article appeared the information that, thanks to the *Courier's* generosity, its readers might obtain horoscopes from the infallible Miss Keats at the cost of one shilling, coupon on the back page.

Grant tucked the smaller illustrateds under his arm, and prepared to get off the boat. He watched a sailor twisting a hawser around a bollard and wished that he had chosen a profession that dealt with things and not with people.

The *Petronel* was moored in the roads. Grant engaged a boatman and was rowed out to her. An elderly deckhand pushed a pipe into a pocket and prepared to receive them. Grant asked if Lord Giles were on board, happily aware that he was in Buckinghamshire. On hearing that he was not expected for a week, Grant looked suitably disappointed and asked if he might come on board: he had hoped that Giles would show him the craft. The man was pleased and garrulous. He was alone on board and had been very bored. It would be a pleasant diversion to show the good-looking friend of Lord Giles around the ship, and no doubt there would be a tip forthcoming. He did the honors with a detail that wearied Grant a little, but he was very informative. When Grant remarked on the splendid sleeping accommodation, the man said that Lord Giles wasn't one for ever sleeping ashore if he could help it. Never so happy as on salt water, Lord Giles wasn't.

"Lord Edward isn't so fond of it," Grant remarked, and the man chuckled.

"No, not Lord Edward, he wasn't. He was ashore the minute the dinghy could be swung out or a hawser slapped on a quay."

"I suppose he stayed with the Beechers the night you made Dover?"

The deckhand didn't rightly know where he slept. All he knew was that he didn't sleep on board. In fact, they hadn't seen him again. His hand luggage had been sent to the boat train and the rest had been sent to town after him. Because of the sad thing that happened to his lady, that was. Had Grant ever seen her? A film actress, she was. Very good, too. It was dreadful wasn't it, the things that happened in good families nowadays. Even murders. Changed days indeed.

"Oh, I don't know," Grant said. "The older families of England made a pastime of murder if my history books told the truth."

The man was so pleased with his tip that he offered to make cocoa for the visitor, but Grant wanted to get ashore so that he could talk to the Yard. On the way back he wondered just how Champneis had spent that night ashore. The most likely explanation was that he had stayed with friends. But if he had stayed with friends, why the desire to avoid attention? The more Grant thought of it the more out-of-character it was in the man to want to hide anything. Edward Champneis was a person who did what he wanted to in broad daylight and cared not a straw for opinions or consequences. Grant found it difficult to associate him in his mind with any furtive activity whatever. And that very thought led to a logical and rather staggering sequel. It was no petty thing that Champneis had to hide. Nothing but some matter of vast importance would have driven Champneis to prevarication. Grant could dismiss, therefore, any thought of a light love affair. Champneis had, in any case, a reputation that bordered on the austere. And if one dismissed a love affair what was left? What possible activity could a man of Champneis's stamp want to keep secret? Except murder!

Murder was just possible. If that calm security were once shattered, who knew what might flame out? He was a man who would both give and demand fidelity—and be unforgiving to the faithless. Supposing—! There was Harmer. Christine Clay's colleagues may have doubted that she and Harmer were lovers, but the *beau monde*, unused to the partnership of work, had no

doubt. Had Champneis come to believe that? His and Christine's love for each other was an equable affair, but his pride would be a very real thing, fragile and passionate. Had he—? That was an idea! Had he driven over to the cottage that night? He was, after all, the only person who knew where she was: nearly all her telegrams had been to him. He was in Dover, and she was only an hour away. What more natural than that he should have motored over to surprise her? And if so—

A picture swam into Grant's mind. The cottage in the summer dark, the lit windows open to the night, so that every word, every movement almost, is audible outside. And in the rose-tangled mass of the garden a man standing, arrested by the voices. He stands there, quite silent, quite still, watching. Presently the lights go out. And in a little while the figure in the garden moves away. Where? To brood on his homecoming; on his cuckold state? To tramp the downs till morning? To see her come to the beach, unexpected, alone? To—

Grant shook himself and picked up the telephone receiver.

"Edward Champneis didn't spend the night of Wednesday on board," he said, when he had been connected. "I want to know where he did spend it. And don't forget, discretion is the better part. You may find that he spent it with the Warden of the Cinque Ports, or something equally orthodox, but I'll be surprised if he did. It would be a good idea if someone got friendly with his valet and went through his wardrobe for a dark coat. You know the strongest card we have is that no one outside the force knows about that button. The fact that we asked for any discarded coat that was found to be brought in doesn't convey much to anyone. The chances are ten to one, I think, that the coat is still with its owner. Keeping a coat, even with a missing button, is less conspicuous than getting rid of one. And that SOS for the coat was only a police circular, anyhow, not a public appeal. So inspect the Champneis wardrobe. . . . No, I haven't got anything on him. . . . Yes, I know it is mad. But I'm not taking any more chances in this case. Only be discreet, for Heaven's sake. I'm in bad enough odor as it is. What is the news? Has Tisdall turned up?... Oh, well, I expect he will by night. He might give the Press a break. They're waiting breathless for him. How is the Clay dossier coming? . . . Oh. Has Vine come back from interviewing the dresser—what's-her-name? Bundle—yet? No? All right, I'm coming straight back to town."

As Grant hung up he shut his mind quickly on the thought that tried to jump in. Of *course* Tisdall was all right. What could happen to an adult in the English countryside in summer? Of course he was all right.

The dossier was filling up nicely. Henry Gotobed had been an estate carpenter near Long Eaton, and had married a laundry maid at the "big house." He had been killed in a threshing-mill accident, and—partly because his father and grandfather had been estate servants, partly because she was not strong enough to work—the widow had been given a small pension. The cottage at Long Eaton having to be vacated, she had brought her two children to Nottingham, where there was better hope of ultimate employment for them. The girl was then twelve and the boy fourteen. It had been curiously difficult to obtain information about them after that. Information other than the bare official record, that is to say. In the country, changes were slow, interests circumscribed, and memories long. But in the fluctuating life of the town, where a family stayed perhaps six months in a house and moved elsewhere, interest was superficial where it existed at all.

Meg Hindler, the Newsreel's protégée, had proved the only real help. She was an enormous, hearty, loud-voiced, goodnatured woman, who cuffed her numerous brood with one hand and caressed with the other. She was still suffering a little from a Nell Cozens phobia, but when she could be kept off the Cozens tack she was genuinely informative. She remembered the family not because there was anything memorable about them, but because she had lived with her own family across the landing from them, and had worked in the same factory as Chris, so that they sometimes came home together. She had liked Chris Gotobed in a mild way; didn't approve of her stuck-up ideas, of course; if you had to earn your living by working in a factory, then you had to earn your living by working in a factory, and why make a fuss about it? Not that Chris made a fuss, but she had a way of shaking the dust of the factory off her as if it was dirt. And she wore a hat always; a quite unnecessary piece of affectation. She had adored her mother, but her mother couldn't see anything in life but Herbert. A nasty piece of work, if ever there was one, Herbert. As slimy, sneaking, cadging, self-satisfied a piece of human trash as you'd meet in a month of Sundays. But Mrs. Gotobed thought he was the cat's whiskers. He was always making it difficult for Chris. Chris had once talked her mother into letting her have dancing lessons—though what you wanted dancing lessons for, Meg couldn't think: you'd only to watch the others hopping around for a little and you'd got the general idea: after that it was only practice—but when Herbert had heard about it he had quickly put a stop to anything like that. They couldn't afford it, he said—they never could afford anything unless Herbert wanted it—and besides, dancing was a light thing, and the Lord wouldn't approve. Herbert always knew what the Lord would like. He not only stopped the dancing lesson idea but he found some way of getting the money Chris had saved and that she had hoped her mother would make up to the required amount. He had pointed out how selfish it was of Chris to save money for her own ends when their mother was so poorly. He talked such a lot about their mother's bad health that Mrs. Gotobed began to feel very poorly indeed, and took to her bed. And Herbert helped eat the delicacies that Chris bought. And Herbert went with his mother for four days to Skegness because Chris couldn't leave the factory and it just happened that this was one of the numerous occasions when Herbert was without a job.

Yes, Meg had been helpful. She did not know what had become of the family, of course. Chris had left Nottingham the day after her mother's funeral, and because the rent was paid up to the end of the week Herbert had stayed on alone in the house for several days after. Meg remembered that because he had had one of his "meetings" in the house—he was always having meetings where he could hear the sound of his own voice—and the neighbors had to complain about the noise of the singing. As if there wasn't enough row always going on in a tenement without adding meetings to the din! What kind of meetings? Well, as far as she could remember he had begun with political harangues, but very soon took to religion; because it doesn't matter how you rave at your audience, when it's religion they don't throw things. She personally didn't think it mattered to him what he was talking about as long as he was the person who was talking. She never knew anyone who had a better opinion of himself with less cause than Herbert Gotobed.

No, she didn't know where Chris had gone, or whether Herbert knew her whereabouts. Knowing Herbert, she thought that Chris had probably gone without saying good-bye. She hadn't said good-bye to anyone, if it came to that. Meg's younger brother, Sydney—the one that was now in Australia—had had a fancy for her, but she didn't give him any encouragement. Didn't have any beau, Chris didn't. Funny, wasn't it, that she should have seen Christine Clay on the screen often and often, and never recognized Chris Gotobed. She had changed a lot, that she had. She'd heard that they made you over in Hollywood. Perhaps that was it. And of course it was a long time between seventeen and thirty. Look what a few years had done to her, come to think of it.

And Meg had laughed her ample laugh and revolved her ample figure for the detective's inspection, and had given him a cup of stewed tea and Rich Mixed Biscuits.

But the detective—who was the Sanger who had assisted at the nonarrest of Tisdall, and who was also a Clay fan—remembered that even in a city there are communities who have interests as narrow and memories as long as any village dwellers, and so he had come eventually to the little house in a suburb beyond the Trent where Miss Stammers lived with a toy Yorkshire terrier and the wireless. Both terrier and wireless had been given her on her retirement. She would never have had the initiative after thirty years of teaching at Beasley Road Elementary School to acquire either on her own behalf. School had been her life, and school still surrounded her. She remembered Christina Gotobed very clearly indeed. What did Mr. Sanger want to know about her? Not Mr.? A detective? Oh, dear! She did hope that there was nothing serious the matter. It was all a very long time ago, and of course she had not kept in touch with Christina. It was impossible to keep in touch with all one's pupils when

one had as many as sixty in a class. But she had been an exceptionally promising child, exceptionally promising.

Sanger had asked if she was unaware that her exceptionally promising pupil was Christine Clay?

"Christine Clay? The film actress you mean? Dear me. Dear me!"

Sanger had thought the expression a little inadequate until he noticed her small eyes grow suddenly large with tears. She took off her pince-nez and wiped them away with a neatly folded square of handkerchief.

"So famous?" she murmured. "Poor child. Poor child."

Sanger reminded her of the reason for Christine's prominence in the news. But she seemed less occupied with the woman's cruel end than with the achievement of the child she had known.

"She was very ambitious, you know," she said. "That is how I remember her so well. She was not like the others: anxious to get away from school and become wage earners. That is what appeals to most elementary children, you know, Mr. Sanger: a weekly wage in their pockets and the means of getting out of their crowded homes. But Christine wanted to go to the secondary school. She actually won a scholarship—a 'free place,' they call it. But her people could not afford to let her take it. She came to me and cried about it. It was the only time I had known her to cry: she was not an emotional child. I asked her mother to come to see me. A pleasant enough woman, but without force of character. I couldn't persuade her. Weak people can be very stubborn. It was a regret in my mind for years, that I had failed. I had great feeling for the child's ambition. I had been very ambitious once myself, and had—had to put my desire aside. I understood what Christina was going through. I lost sight of her when she left school. She went to work in the factory, I remember. They needed the money. There was a brother who was not earning. An unsympathetic character. And the mother's pension was small. But she made her career, after all. Poor child. Poor child!"

Sanger had asked, as he was taking his departure, how it was that she had missed the articles in the newspapers about Christine Clay's childhood.

She never saw Sunday newspapers, she said, and the daily paper was handed on to her a day late by her very kind neighbors, the Timpsons, and at present they were at the seaside, so that she was without news, except for the posters. Not that she missed the papers much. A matter of habit, didn't Mr. Sanger think? After three days without one, the desire to read a newspaper vanished. And really, one was happier without. Very depressing reading they made these days. In her little home she found it difficult to believe in so much violence and hatred.

Sanger had made further inquiries from many people about that unsympathetic character Herbert Gotobed. But hardly anyone remembered him. He had never stayed in a job for more than five months (the five months was his record: in an ironmonger's) and no one had been sorry to see him go. No one knew what had become of him.

But Vine, coming back from interviewing the onetime dresser, Bundle, in South Street, had brought news of him. Yes. Bundle had known there was a brother. The snapping brown eyes in the wizened face had snapped ferociously at the very mention of him. She had only seen him once, and she hoped she never saw him again. He had sent in a note to her lady one night in New York, to her dressing room. It was the first dressing room she had ever had to herself, the first show she had been billed in, Let's Go! it was. And she was a success. Bundle had dressed her as a chorus girl, along with nine others, but when her lady had gone up in the world she had taken Bundle with her. That's the sort her lady was: never forgot a friend. She had been talking and laughing till the note was brought in. But when she read that she was just like someone who was about to take a spoonful of ice cream and noticed a beetle in it. When he came in she had said, "So you've turned up!" He said he'd come to warn her that she was bound for perdition, or something. She said, "Come to see what pickings there are, you mean." Bundle had never seen her so angry. She had just taken off her day makeup to put on her stage one, and there wasn't a spark of color anywhere in her face. She had sent Bundle out of the room then, but there had been a grand row. Bundle, standing guard before the door—there were lots, even then, who thought they would like to meet her lady—couldn't help hearing some of it. In the end she had to go in because her lady was going to be late for her entrance if she didn't. The man had turned on her for interrupting, but her lady had said that she would give him in charge if he didn't go. He had gone then, and had never to her knowledge turned up again. But he had written. Letters came from him occasionally—Bundle recognized the writing—and he always seemed to know where they were, because the address was the correct one, not a forwarded affair. Her lady always had acute depression after a letter had come. Sometimes for two days or more. She had said once, "Hate is very lowering, isn't it, Bundle?" Bundle had never hated anyone except a cop who was habitually rude to her, but she had hated him plenty, and she agreed that hate was very weakening. Burned you up inside till there was nothing left.

And to Bundle's account of Christine's brother was added the report of the American police. Herbert Gotobed had entered the States about five years after his sister. He had worked for a short while as a sort of houseman for a famous Boston divine who had been taken (in) by his manners and his piety. He had left the divine under some sort of cloud—the exact nature of the cloud was doubtful since the divine, either from Christian charity or more likely from a reluctance to have his bad judgment made public, had preferred no charges—and had disappeared from the ken of the police. It was supposed, however, that he was the man who, under the name of the Brother of God, had toured the States in the role of prophet, and had been, it was reported, both an emotional and financial success. He had been jailed in Kentucky for blasphemy, in Texas for fraud, in Missouri for creating a riot, in Arkansas for his own safety, and in Wyoming for seduction. In all detentions he had denied any connection with Herbert Gotobed. He had no name, he said, other than the Brother of God. When the police had pointed out that relation to the deity would not be considered by them an insuperable obstacle to deportation, he had taken the hint and had disappeared. The last that had been heard of him was that he had run a mission in the islands somewhere—Fiji, they thought—and had decamped with the funds to Australia.

"A charming person," Grant said, looking up from the dossier.

"That's our man, sir, never a doubt of it," Williams said.

"He certainly has all the stigmata: greed, enormous conceit, and lack of conscience. I rather hope he is our man. It would be doing the world a good turn to squash that slug. But why did he do it?"

"Hoped for money, perhaps."

"Hardly likely. He must have known only too well how she felt about him."

"I wouldn't put it past him to forge a will, sir."

"No, neither would I. But if he has a forged will, why hasn't he come forward? It will soon be a fortnight since her death. We haven't a thing to go on. We don't even know that he's in England."

"He's in England all right, sir. 'Member what her housekeeper said: that he always knew where she was? Clay had been more than three months in England. You bet he was here, too."

"Yes. Yes, that's true. Australia? Let me see." He looked up the New York report again. "That's about two years ago. He'd be difficult to trace there, but if he came to England after Clay he shouldn't be difficult to trace. He can't keep his mouth shut. Anything quite so vocal must be noticeable."

"No letters from him among her things?"

"No, Lord Edward has been through everything. Tell me, Williams, on what provocation, for what imaginable reason, would a Champneis, in your opinion, tell a lie?"

"Noblesse oblige," said Williams promptly.

Grant stared. "Quite right," he said at length. "I hadn't thought of that. Can't imagine what he could have been shielding, though."

So the candles weren't the kind you go to bed with, Grant thought, as the car sped along the embankment that Monday afternoon en route for the Temple; they were the kind you put on altars. The Brother of God's tabernacle had been none of your bare mission tents. It had been hung with purple and fine linen and furnished with a shrine of great magnificence. And what had been merely an expression of Herbert's own love of the theatrical had in most cases (Kentucky was an exception) proved good business. A beauty-starved and theatrically-minded people had fallen hard—in hard cash.

Christine's shilling was the measure of her contempt. Her return, perhaps, for all those occasions when Herbert's Lord had seen fit to deny her the small things her soul needed.

In the green subaqueous light of Mr. Erskine's small room beside the plane tree, Grant put his proposition to the lawyer. They wanted to bring Herbert Gotobed to the surface, and this was the way to do it. It was quite orthodox, so the lawyer needn't mind doing it. Lord Edward had approved.

The lawyer hummed and hawed, not because he had any real objections but because it is a lawyer's business to consider remote contingencies, and a straightforward agreement to anything would be wildly unprofessional. In the end he agreed that it might be done.

Grant said: "Very well, I leave it to you. In tomorrow's papers, please," and went out wondering why the legal mind delighted in manufacturing trouble when there was so much ready-made in the world. There was plenty in poor Grant's mind at the moment. "Surrounded by trouble," as the spaewives said when they told your cards: that's what he was. Monday would soon be over and there was no sign that Robert Tisdall was in the world of men. The first low howl had come from the Clarion that morning, and by tomorrow the whole wolf pack would be on him. Where was Robert Tisdall? What were the police doing to find him? To do Grant justice the discomfort in his mind was less for the outcry that was imminent than for the welfare of Tisdall. He had genuinely believed for the last two days that Tisdall's nonappearance was due to lack of knowledge on Tisdall's part. It is not easy to see newspapers when one is on the run. But now doubt like a chill wind played through his thoughts. There was something wrong. Every newspaper poster in every village in England had read: TISDALL INNOCENT. HUNTED MAN INNOCENT. How could he have missed it? In every pub, railway carriage, bus, and house in the country the news had been the favorite subject of conversation. And yet Tisdall was silent. No one had seen him since Erica drove away from him last Wednesday. On Thursday night the whole of England had been swamped by the worst storm for years, and it had rained and blown for two days afterwards. Tisdall had picked up the food left by Erica on Thursday, but not afterwards. The food she left on Friday was still there, a sodden pulp, on Saturday. Grant knew that Erica had spent all that Saturday scouring the countryside; she had quartered the country with the efficiency and persistence of a game dog, every barn, every shelter of any description, being subjected to search. Her very sound theory was that shelter he must have had on Thursday night—no human being could have survived such a storm—and since he had been in that chalky lane on Thursday morning to pick up the food she left, then he could not have gone far afield.

But her efforts had come to nothing. Today an organized gang of amateur searchers had undertaken the work—the police had no men to spare—but so far no news had come. And in Grant's mind was growing a slow fear that he tried with all his self-awareness to beat down. But it was like a moor fire. You whipped it to cinder only to see it run under the surface and break out ahead of you.

News from Dover was slow, too. The investigation was hampered beyond any but police patience by the necessity of (a) not offending the peerage, and (b) not frightening the bird: the first applying to a possibly innocent, the second to a possibly guilty. It was all very complicated. Watching Edward Champneis's calm face—he had eyebrows which gave a peculiar expression of repose—while he discussed with him the trapping of Herbert, Grant had several times forcibly to restrain himself from saying: "Where were you on Wednesday night?" What would Champneis do? Look a little puzzled, think a moment, and then say: "The night I arrived in Dover? I spent it with the So-and-sos at Such-and-such." And then realization of what the question entailed would dawn, and he would look incredulously at Grant, and Grant would feel the world's prize fool. More! In Edward Champneis's presence he felt that it was sheer insult to suggest that he might have been responsible for his wife's death. Away from him, that picture of the man in the garden, watching the lighted house with the open windows, might swim up in his mind more often than he cared to admit. But in his presence, any such thought was fantastic. Until his men had accounted—or failed to account—for Champneis's movements that night, any direct inquiry must be shelved.

All he knew so far was that Champneis had stayed in none of the obvious places. The hotels and the family friends had both been drawn blank. The radius was now being extended. At any moment news might come that my lord had slept in a blameless four-poster and the county's best linen sheets, and Grant would be forced to admit that he had been mistaken when he imagined that Lord Edward was deliberately misleading him.

On Tuesday morning word came from Collins, the man who was investigating Champneis's wardrobe. Bywood, the valet, had proved "very sticky going," he reported. He didn't drink and he didn't smoke and there seemed to be no plane on which Collins could establish a mutual regard. But every man has his price, and Bywood's proved to be snuff. A very secret vice, it was. Lord Edward would dismiss him on the spot if he suspected such indulgence. (Lord Edward would probably have been highly pleased by anything so eighteenth century.) Collins had procured him "very special snuff," and had at last got within inspecting distance of the wardrobe. On his arrival in England—or rather, in London—Champneis had weeded out his wardrobe. The weeding out had included two coats, one dark and one camel hair. Bywood had given the camel hair one to his brother-in-law, a chorus boy; the other he had sold to a dealer in London. Collins gave the name and address of the dealer.

Grant sent an officer down to the dealer, and as the officer went through the stock the dealer said: "That coat came from Lord Edward Champneis, the Duke of Bude's son. Nice bit of stuff."

It was a nice bit of stuff. And it had all its buttons; with no sign of replacements.

Grant sighed when the news came, not sure whether he was glad or sorry. But he still wanted to know where Champneis had spent the night.

And what the Press wanted to know was where Tisdall was. Every newspaper in Britain wanted to know. The C.I.D. were in worse trouble than they had been for many years. The *Clarion* openly called them murderers, and Grant, trying to get a line on a baffling case, was harassed by the fury of colleagues, the condolences of his friends, a worried Commissioner, and his own growing anxiety. In the middle of the morning Jammy Hopkins rang up to explain away his "middle" in the *Clarion*. It was "all in the way of business," and he knew his good friends at the Yard would understand. Grant was out, and it was Williams at the other end of the telephone. Williams was not in the mood for butter. He relieved his overburdened soul with a gusto which left Hopkins hoping that he had not irretrievably put himself in the wrong with the Yard. "As for hounding people to death," Williams finished, "you know very well that the Press do more hounding in a week than the Yard has since it was founded. And *all* your victims are innocent!"

"Oh, have a heart, Sergeant! You know we've got to deliver the goods. If we don't make it hot and strong, we'll be out on our ear. St. Martin's Crypt, or the Embankment. And you pushing people off the seats. We've got our jobs to keep just as much as "

The sound of Williams's hang-up was eloquent. It was action and comment compressed into one little monosyllable. Jammy felt hardly used. He had enjoyed writing that article. He had in fact been full of righteous indignation as the scarifying phrases poured forth. When Jammy was writing his tongue came out of its habitual position in his cheek, and emotion flooded him. That the tongue went back when he had finished did not matter; the popular appeal of his article was secure; it was "from the heart"; and his salary went up by leaps and bounds.

But he was a little hurt that all his enemies-on-paper couldn't see just what a jape it was. He flung his hat with a disgusted gesture onto his right eyebrow and went out to lunch.

And less than five minutes away Grant was sitting in a dark corner, a huge cup of black coffee before him, his head propped in his hands. He was "telling it to himself in words of one syllable."

Christine Clay was living in secret. But the murderer knew where she was. That eliminated a lot of people.

Champneis knew.

Jason Harmer knew.

Herbert Gotobed almost certainly knew.

The murderer had worn a coat dark enough to be furnished with a black button and black sewing thread.

Champneis had such a coat, but there was no missing button.

Jason Harmer had no such coat; and had not lately worn any such coat.

No one knew what Herbert Gotobed wore.

The murderer had a motive so strong and of such duration that he could wait for his victim at six of a morning and deliberately drown her.

Champneis had a possible motive.

Jason Harmer had a possible motive if they had been lovers, but there was no proof of that.

Herbert Gotobed had no known motive but had almost certainly hated her.

On points Gotobed won. He knew where his sister was; he had the kind of record that was "headed for murder"; and he had been on bad terms with the victim.

Oh, well! By tomorrow Gotobed might have declared himself. Meanwhile he would drug himself with black coffee and try to keep his mind off the Press.

As he raised the cup to his lips, his eyes lighted on a man in the opposite corner. The man's cup was half-empty, and he was watching Grant with amused and friendly eyes.

Grant smiled, and hit first. "Hiding that famous profile from the public gaze? Why don't you give your fans a break?"

"It's all break for them. A fan can't be wrong. You're being given a hell of a time, aren't you? What do they think the police

are? Clairvoyants?"

Grant rolled the honey on his tongue and swallowed it.

"Someday," Owen Hughes said, "someone is going to screw Jammy Hopkins's head off his blasted shoulders. If my face wasn't insured for the sum total of the world's gold, I'd do it myself. He once said I was 'every girl's dream'!"

"And aren't you?"

"Have you seen my cottage lately?"

"No. I saw the photograph of the wreck in the paper one day."

"I don't mind telling you I wept when I got out of the car and saw it. I'd like to broadcast that photograph to the ends of the earth as a sample of what publicity can do. Fifty years ago a few people might have come a few miles to look at the place, and then gone home satisfied. They came in charabanc loads to see Briars. My lawyer tried to stop the running of the 'trips,' but there was nothing he could do. The County Police refused to keep a man there after the first few days. About ten thousand people have come in the last fortnight, and every one of the ten thousand has peered through the windows, stood on the plants, and taken away a souvenir. There is hardly a scrap of hedge left—it used to be twelve feet high, a mass of roses—and the garden is a wilderness of trampled mud. I was rather attached to that garden. I didn't croon to the pansies, exactly, but I got a lot of kick out of planting things people gave me, and seeing them come up. Not a vestige left."

"Rotten luck! And no redress. Maddening for you. Perhaps by next year the plants will have taken heart again."

"Oh, I'm selling the place. It's haunted. Had you ever met Clay? No? She was grand. They don't make that kind in pairs."

"Do you know of anyone who would be likely to want to murder her, by any chance?"

Hughes smiled one of the smiles which made his fans grip the arms of their cinema seats. "I know lots who would gladly have murdered her on the spot. But only on the spot. The minute you cooled off, you'd cheerfully die for her. It's most unlikely death for Chris—the one that happened to her. Did you know that Lydia Keats prophesied it from her horoscope? She's a marvel, Lydia. She should have been drowned when she was a pup, but she really is a marvel. I sent her Marie Dacre's year, day, and minute of birth from Hollywood. Marie made me swear an oath before she divulged the awful truth of the year. Lydia hadn't the faintest notion whose horoscope she was doing, and it was marvelously accurate. She'd be a wow in Hollywood."

"She seems to be heading that way," Grant said dryly. "Do you like the place?"

"Oh, yes. It's restful." As Grant raised his eyebrows: "There are so many pebbles on the beach that you're practically anonymous."

"I thought they ran rubbernecking tours for Midwest fans."

"Oh, yes, they run motor coaches down your street, but they don't tramp your flowers into the ground."

"If you were murdered they might."

"Not they. Murders are ten cents the dozen. Well, I must get along. Good luck. And God bless you. You've done me a power of good, so help me you have."

"I?"

"You've brought to my notice one profession that is worse than my own." He dropped some money on the table and picked up his hat. "They pray for judges on Sundays, but never a word for the police!"

He adjusted the hat at the angle which after much testing had been found by cameramen to be the most becoming, and strolled out, leaving Grant vaguely comforted.

The person who wasn't comforted was Jammy. The buoyant, the resilient, the hard-boiled but bouncing Jammy. He had eaten at his favorite pub (black coffee might be all very well for worried police officials and actors who had to think of their figure, but Jammy dealt only in other people's worries and remembered his figure only when his tailor measured him) and nothing during lunch had been right. The beef had been a shade too "done," the beer had been a shade too warm, the waiter had had hiccoughs, the potatoes were soapy, the cabinet pudding had tasted of baking soda, and they were out of his usual cigarettes. And so his feeling of being ill-used and misunderstood, instead of being charmed away by food and drink, had grown into an exasperation with the world in general. He looked sourly over his glass at his colleagues and contemporaries, laughing and talking over the coarse white cloths, and they, unused to a glower on his brow, paused in their traffic to tease him.

"What is it, Jammy? Pyorrhea?"

"No. He's practicing to be a dictator. You begin with the expression."

"No you don't," said a third. "You begin with the hair."

"And an arm movement. Arms are very important. Look at Napoleon. Never been more than a corporal if he hadn't thought up that arm-on-chest business. Pregnant, you know."

"If it's pregnant Jammy is, he'd better have the idea in the office, not here. I don't think the child's going to be a pleasant sight."

Jammy consigned them all to perdition, and went out to find a tobacconist who kept his brand of cigarettes. What did the Yard want to take it like that for? Everyone knew that what you wrote in a paper was just eyewash. When it wasn't bilgewater. If you stopped being dramatic over little tuppenny no-account things, people might begin to suspect that they were no-account, and then they'd stop buying papers. And where would the Press barons, and Jammy, and a lot of innocent shareholders be then? You'd got to provide emotions for all those moribund wage-earners who were too tired or too dumb to feel anything on their own behalf. If you couldn't freeze their blood, then you could sell them a good sob or two. That story about Clay's early days in the factory had been pure jam—even if that horse-faced dame had led him up the garden about knowing Chris, blast her. But you couldn't always rise to thrills or sobs, and if there was one emotion that the British public loved to wallow in it was being righteously indignant. So he, Jammy, had provided a wallow for them. The Yard knew quite well that tomorrow all these indignant people wouldn't remember a thing about it, so what the hell! What was there to get sore about? That "hounding innocents to death" was just a phrase. Practically a cliché it was. Nothing in that to make a sensible person touchy. The Yard were feeling a bit thin in the skin, that was what. They knew quite well that this shouldn't have been allowed to happen. Far be it from him to crab another fellow's work, but some of that article had been practically true, now he came to think of it. Not the "hounding to death," of course. But some of the other bits. It really was something amounting to a disgrace—oh, well, disgrace was a bit strong; but regrettable, anyhow, that such a thing should occur in a force that thought it was efficient. They were so very superior and keep-off-the-grass when times were good; they couldn't expect sympathy when they made a bloomer. Now if they were to let the Press in on the inside, the way they did in America, things like that simply wouldn't happen. He, Jammy Hopkins, might be only a crime reporter, but he knew just as much about crime and its detection as any police force. If the "old man" were to give him leave, and the police the use of their files, he would have the man who killed Clay inside prison walls and on the front page, of course—inside a week. Imagination, that's what the Yard needed. And he had plenty of it. All he needed was a chance.

He bought his cigarettes, emptied them gloomily into the gold case his provincial colleagues had given him when he left for London (it was whispered that the munificence was more the expression of thankfulness than of devotion), and went gloomily back to the office. In the front entrance of that up-to-the-minute cathedral which is the headquarters of the *Clarion*, he encountered young Musker, one of the junior reporters, on his way out. He nodded briefly, and without stopping made the conventional greeting.

"Where you off to?"

"Lecture on stars," said Musker, with no great enthusiasm.

"Very interesting, astronomy," reproved Jammy.

"Not astronomy. Astrology." The boy was turning from the shade of the entrance into the sunlit street. "Woman called Pope or something."

"Pope!" Jammy stood arrested halfway to the lift door. "You don't mean Keats, do you?"

"Is it Keats?" Musker looked at the card again. "Yes, so it is. I knew it was a poet. Hey, What's the matter?" as Jammy caught him by the arm and dragged him back into the hall.

"Matter is you're not going to any astrology lecture," said Jammy, propeling him into the lift.

"Well!" said the astonished Musker. "For this relief much thanks, but why? You got a 'thing' about astrology?"

Jammy dragged him into an office and assaulted with his rapid speech the placid pink man behind the desk.

"But, Jammy," said the placid one when he could get a word in edgeways, "it was Blake's assignment. He was the obvious person for it: doesn't he tell the world every week on Page 6 what is going to happen to it for the next seven days? It's his subject: astrology. What he didn't foresee was that his wife would have a baby this week instead of next. So I let him off and sent

Musker instead."

"Musker!" said Jammy. "Say, don't you know that this is the woman who foretold Clay's death? The woman the *Courier* is running to give horoscopes at a shilling a time?"

"What of it?"

"What of it! Man, she's news!"

"She's the Courier's news. And about dead at that. I killed a story about her yesterday."

"All right, then, she's dead. But a lot of 'interesting' people must be interested in her at this moment. And the most interested of the lot is going to be the man who made her prophecy come true! For all we know she may have been responsible for giving him the idea; her and her prophecies. Keats may be dead, but her vicinity isn't. Not by a long chalk." He leaned forward and took the card that the Musker boy was still holding. "Find something for this nice boy to do this afternoon. He doesn't like astrology. See you later."

"But what about that story for-"

"All right, you'll have your story. And perhaps another one into the bargain!"

As Jammy was shot downwards in the lift he flicked the card in his hand with a reflective thumb. The Elwes Hall! Lydia was coming on!

"Know the best way to success, Pete?" he said to the liftman.

"All right, I'll buy," said Pete.

"Choose a good brand of hooey."

"You should know!" grinned Pete, and Jammy made a pass at him as he stepped through the doors. Pete had known him since—well, if not since his short-pant days, at least since his wrong-kind-of-collar days.

The Elwes Hall was in Wigmore Street: a nice neighborhood; which had been responsible in no small measure for its success. Chamber music was much more attractive when one could combine it with tea at one's club and seeing about that frock at Debenham's. And the plump sopranos who were flattered at the hush that attended their lieder never guessed at the crepeversus-satin that filled their listeners' minds. It was a pleasant little place: small enough to be intimate, large enough not to be huddled. As Jammy made his way to a seat, he observed that it was filled with the most fashionable audience that he had seen at any gathering since the Beaushire-Curzon wedding. Not only was "smart" society present in bulk, but there was a blue-blooded leaven of what Jammy usually called "duchesses-up-for-the-day": of those long-shoed, long-nosed, long-pedigreed people who lived on their places and not on their wits. And sprinkled over the gathering, of course, were the cranks.

The cranks came not for the thrill, nor because Lydia's mother had been the third daughter of an impoverished marquis, but because the Lion, the Bull, and the Crab were household pets of theirs, the houses of the Zodiac their spiritual home. There was no mistaking them: their pale eyes rested on the middle distance, their clothes looked like a bargain basement after a stay-in strike, and it seemed that they all wore the same string of sixpenny beads around their thin necks.

Jammy refused the seat which had been reserved for the *Clarion* representative, and insisted on having one among the palms on the far side of the hall below the platform. This had been refused, with varying degrees of indignation, by both those who had come to see Lydia and those who had come to be seen. But Jammy belonged to neither of these. What Jammy had come to see was the audience. And the seat half buried in Messrs. Willoughby's decorations provided as good a view of the audience as anything but the platform itself could afford.

Next to him was a shabby little man of thirty-five or so, who eyed Jammy as he sat down and presently leaned over until his rabbit-mouth was an inch from Jammy's ear, and breathed:

"Wonderful woman!"

This Jammy took to refer to Lydia.

"Wonderful," he agreed. "You know her?"

The shabby man ("crank," said Jammy's mind, placing him) hesitated, and then said: "No. But I knew Christine Clay." And further converse was prevented by the arrival of Lydia and her chairman on the platform.

Lydia was at the best of times a poor speaker. She had a high thin voice, and when she became enthusiastic or excited her delivery was painfully like a very old gramophone record played on a very cheap gramophone. Jammy's attention soon wandered. He had heard Lydia on her favorite subject too often. His eyes began to quarter the crowded little hall. If *be* had bumped off Clay, and was still, thanks to the inadequacy of the police, both unsuspected and at large, would he or would he not come to see the woman who had prophesied for Clay the end he had brought about?

Jammy decided that, on the whole, he would. The Clay murderer was clever. That was admitted. And he must now be hugging himself over his cleverness. Thinking how superior a man of his caliber was to the ordinary rules that hedged common mortals. That was a common frame of mind in persons who achieved a planned murder. They had planned something forbidden, and had brought it off. It went to their heads like wine. They looked around for more "dares" to bring off, as children play "last across the road." This, this orthodox gathering of orthodox people in one of the most orthodox districts in London, was a perfect "dare." In every mind in that hall the thought of Christine's death was uppermost. It was not mentioned from the platform, of course; the dignities must be observed. The lecture was a simple lecture on astrology; its history and its meaning. But all these people—or nearly all—had come to the gathering because nearly a year ago Lydia had had that lucky brain wave about the manner of Christine Clay's death. Christine was almost as much part of the gathering as Lydia herself; the hall was full of her. Yes, it would give Jammy, hypothetical murderer, a great kick to be one of that audience.

He looked at the audience now, pluming himself on the imagination that had got him where he was; the imagination that Grant, poor dear idiot, could never aspire to. He wished he had brought Bartholomew along. Bart was much better informed where the society racket was concerned than he was. It was Bart's business to be descriptive: and at whatever was "descriptive"—weddings, motor racing, launches, or whatnot—the same faces from the racket turned up. Bart would have been useful.

But Jammy knew enough of those faces to keep him interested.

"On the other hand," said Lydia, "Capricorn people are often melancholic, doubtful of themselves, and perverse. On a lower plane still, they are gloomy, miserly, and deceptive." But Jammy was not listening. In any case he did not know which of the signs had had the honor of assisting at his birth, and did not care. Lydia had several times told him that he was "typically, oh, but typically, Aries" but he never remembered. All hooey.

There was the Duchess of Trent in the third row. She, poor, silly, unhappy wretch, had the perfect alibi. She had been going to have a luncheon for Christine: a luncheon that would make her the most envied hostess in London instead of a rather tiresome back number, and Christine had gone and died on her.

Jammy's eye wandered, and paused at a good-looking dark face in the fourth row. Very familiar that face; as familiar as the head on a coin. Why? He didn't know the man; would swear he had never seen him in the flesh.

And then it came to him. It was Gene Lejeune; the actor who had been engaged to play opposite Clay in her third and last picture in England: the picture she had never made. It was rumored that Lejeune was glad that he would never have to make that picture; Clay's brilliance habitually made her men look like penny candles; but that was hardly a good reason for getting up at dawn to hold her head under water until she died. Jammy wasn't greatly interested in Lejeune. Next to him was a fashion plate in black and white. Marta Hallard. Of course. Marta had been given the part that Clay had been scheduled to play. Marta was not in the Clay class, but holding up production was likely to prove expensive, and Marta had poise, sophistication, sufficient acting ability, sufficient personality, and what Coyne called "class." She was now Lejeune's leading woman. Or was he her leading man? It would be difficult to say which of these two was the "supporting" one. Neither of them was in the first flight. Considered simply as a partnership, it was likely to prove much more successful than the Clay-Lejeune one would have been. A step up—a big step up for Marta—and more chance to shine for Lejeune. Yes, Christine's death had been a lucky break for both of them.

He heard in his mind a girl's voice saying, "You, of course, murdered her yourself." Who had said that? Yes, that Judy girl who played dumb blondes. And she had said it about Marta. That Saturday night when he and Grant had met on the doorstep of Marta's flat and had been entertained by her. The Judy person had said it with that sulky air of defiance that she used to life's most trivial activities. And they had taken it as a joke. Someone else had laughed and agreed, supplying the motive: "Of course! You wanted that part for yourself!" And the conversation had flowed on in unbroken superficiality.

Well, ambition was one of the better-known incentives to murder. It came, well up the list, just below passion and greed. But Marta Hallard was Marta Hallard. Murder and that brittle, insincere sophisticate were poles apart. She didn't even play murder well on the stage, now he came to think of it. She had always the air of saying at the back of her mind, "Too tiresome, all this earnestness." If she didn't find murder humorless, she would undoubtedly find it plebeian. No, he could imagine Marta being a murderee, but not a murderer.

He became aware that Marta was paying no attention whatever to Lydia. All her interest—and it was a fixed and wholehearted interest—was centered on someone to her right in the row in front. Jammy's eyes followed the imaginary dotted line of her glance and came to rest, a little surprised, on a nondescript little man. Incredulous, he traveled the dotted line again. But the answer was still the small round-faced man with the sleepy expression. Now what could interest Marta Hallard in that very commercial exterior and that far from exciting—

And then Jammy remembered who that little man was. He was Jason Harmer, the songwriter. One of Christine's best friends. Marta's "merry kettle." And, if women's judgment was to be accepted, anything but unexciting. In fact, that was the chap who was popularly supposed to have been Christine Clay's lover. Jammy's mind did the equivalent of a long, low whistle. Well, well, so that was Jay Harmer. He had never seen him off a song cover until now. Queer taste women had, and no mistake.

Harmer was listening to Lydia with a rapt and childlike interest. Jammy wondered how anyone could remain unaware of so concentrated a battery of attention as Marta Hallard was directing on him. There he sat, short-necked and placid, while Marta's brilliant eyes bored into the side of his head. A lot of hooey, that about making people turn by just looking at them. And what, in any case, was the reason for Marta's secret interest? For secret it was. The brim of her hat hid her eyes from her escort, and she had taken it for granted that the eyes of everyone else were on the lecturer. Unconscious of being watched, she was letting her eyes have their fill of Harmer. Why?

Was it a "heart" interest—and if so, just how much of a heart interest? Or was it that, in spite of her companionship of him that night at her flat, she was seeing Jason Harmer as a possible murderer?

For nearly fifteen minutes Jammy watched them both, his mind full of speculation. Again and again his glance went over the crowded little hall and came back to them. Interest there was plenty elsewhere, but not interest like this.

He remembered Marta's instant refutal of the suggestion that there was more than friendship between Harmer and Christine Clay. What did that mean? Was she interested in him herself? And how much? How much would Marta Hallard be interested? Enough to get rid of a rival?

He found himself wondering if Marta was a good swimmer, and pulled himself up. Fifteen minutes ago he had laughed at the very thought of Marta as a person passionate to the point of murder. The very idea had been ludicrous.

But that was before he had observed her interest—her strange consuming interest—in Jason. Supposing—just supposing; to pass the time while that woman made her boring way through the planets and back again—that Marta was in love with this Harmer fellow. That made Christine a double rival of hers, didn't it? Christine had been where Marta, for all her fashionable crust of superficiality and indifference, would have given her right hand to be: at the top of her professional tree. So often Marta had been within sight of that top, only to have the branch she relied on break and let her down. Certainly, and beyond any doubt, Marta wanted professional success. And certainly, for all her fair words, she had bitterly grudged the little factory hand from the Midlands her staggering, and as it seemed too easy, achievement. Five years ago Marta had been very nearly where she was now: famous, successful, financially sound, and with the top of the tree—that elusive, giddy top—somewhere in sight. It had been somewhere in sight for five years. And meanwhile an unknown dancer from a Broadway musical had sung, danced, and acted her way to canonization.

It was no wonder if Marta's fair words where Christine was concerned were the merest lip service. And supposing that Christine had not only the position she had thirsted after, but the man she desired? What then? Was that enough to make Marta Hallard hate to the point of murder?

Where was Marta when Christine was drowned? In Grosvenor Square, presumably. After all, she was playing in that thing at the St. James's. No, wait! At that Saturday night party something was said about her being away! What was it? What was it? She had said something about hard-working actresses, and Clement Clements had mocked, saying: "Hard-working, forsooth. And you've just had a week off to go dashing around the Continent!" She had said: "Not a week, Clement! Only four days. And an actress can presumably play with a broken spine but never with a gumboil."

Clement had said that the gumboil didn't prevent her having a grand time at Deauville. And she had said: "Not Deauville. Le Touquet."

Le Touquet. That was where she had been. And she had come back in time for the Saturday matinee. They had talked about the reception she had had, and the size of the "house," and the rage of her understudy. She had come back after four days at Le Touquet! She was in Le Touquet, just across the channel, when Christine died.

"If parents would only study their children's horoscopes with the same diligence that they use to study their diets," Lydia was saying, shrill as a sparrow and about as impressive, "the world would be a much happier place."

"Le Touquet! Le Touquet!" exulted Jammy's mind. Now he was getting somewhere! Marta Hallard was not only within reach of Christine on that fatal morning, but *she had the means to cover the distance easily*. Le Touquet had opened the doors of his memory. Clements and she and Jammy in that far corner by the cocktail cupboard, and she answering Clements's idle questions. She had flown over, it appeared, with someone in a private plane, and had come back by the same method. And the plane had been an amphibian!

On that misty morning a plane had landed either on the downs or on the sea, had stayed a little, and had gone again without having entered into the consciousness of any but one lonely swimmer. Jammy was so sure of it that he could see the thing come out of the fog like a great bird and drop onto the water.

Who had piloted that plane? Not Harmer. Harmer hadn't been out of England. That was why the police were taking such an interest in him. Harmer had been only too much on the spot. He had an alibi of sorts, but Jammy didn't know whether it was a good one or not. The police were so damned secretive. Well, he was on the track of something that the police, for all their vaunted efficiency, had missed. Marta was a friend of Grant's: it was natural that he should overlook her: he had never seen her look at Harmer, as Jammy was seeing her now; and he didn't know about that plane, Jammy would take his oath. And the plane made all the difference.

And if it was a case of a plane, then there were two in the business. The pilot, if not an accomplice, was certainly an accessory before the fact.

At this point Jammy mentally stopped to draw breath. He looked surprisedly along the well-dressed silent rows to the smart black-and-white figure in the middle distance. What connection had that familiar presence with the person his mind had drawn? There was the real Marta Hallard, her soigné, gracious, serene self. How had he let his mind make her into something so tortured, so desperate?

But she was still looking every now and then at Jason, her eyes resting longer on him than they did on Lydia. And there was something in that unguarded face that joined the real Marta to that shadowy one that his imagination had created. Whatever she might be, Marta Hallard was after all capable of strong feeling.

A patter like rain fell into Jammy's thoughts; the polite percussion of gloved hand on gloved hand. Lydia had apparently reached her peroration. Jammy sighed happily and felt for his hat. He wanted to get out into the air and think what his next move was to be. He hadn't been so excited since Old Man Willindon had given him the exclusive story of how and why he had beaten his wife into pulp.

But there was going to be a question time, it would seem. Miss Keats, sipping water and smiling benevolently between sips, was waiting for the audience to collect its wits. Then some bold spirit began, and presently questions were raining around her. Some were amusing; and the audience, a little tired by the warm air, Lydia's voice, and the dullish lecture, laughed easily in relief. Presently the questions grew more intimate, and then—so inevitably that half the audience could see it coming—the query came:

Was it true that Miss Keats accurately foretold the manner of Christine Clay's death?

There was a shocked and eager silence. Lydia said, simply and with more dignity than she usually possessed, that it was true; that she had often foretold the future truly from a horoscope. She gave some instances.

Emboldened by the growing intimacy of the atmosphere, someone asked if she was helped in her reading of horoscopes by second sight. She waited so long before answering that stillness fell back on the moving heads and hands; their eyes watched her expectantly.

"Yes," she said, at length. "Yes. It is not a matter that I like to discuss. But there are times when I have known, beyond reason, that a thing is so." She paused a moment, as if in doubt, and then took three steps forward to the edge of the platform with such impetuosity that it seemed that she meant to walk forward on to thin air. "And one thing I have known ever since I stepped on the platform. The murderer of Christine Clay is here in this hall."

It is said that ninety-nine people out of a hundred, receiving a telegram reading *All is discovered: fly*, will snatch a toothbrush and make for the garage. Lydia's words were so unexpected, and their meaning when understood so horrifying, that there was a moment of blank silence. And then the rush began, like the first breath of a hurricane through palm trees. Above the rising babel, chairs shrieked like human beings as they were thrust out of the way. And the more they were thrust aside, the greater the chaos and the more frantic the anxiety of the escapers to reach the door. Not one in the crowd knew what they were escaping from. With most of them it began as a desire to escape from a tense situation; they belonged, as a class, to people who hate "awkwardness." But the difficulty of reaching the door through the scattered chairs and the densely packed crowd increased

their natural desire to escape, into something like panic.

The chairman was saying something that was meant to be reassuring, to tide over the situation: but he was quite inaudible. Someone had gone to Lydia, and Jammy heard her say:

"What made me say that? Oh, what made me say that?"

He had moved forward to mount the platform, all the journalist in him tingling with anticipation. But as he laid his hand on the platform edge to vault, he recognized Lydia's escort. It was the fellow from the *Courier*. She was practically the *Courier*'s property, he remembered. It was a million to one against his getting a word with her, and, at these odds, it wasn't worth the effort. There was better game, after all. When Lydia had made that incredible statement, Jammy, having abruptly pulled his own jaw into place, had turned to see how two people took the shock.

Marta had gone quite white, and a look of something like fury had come into her face. She had been one of the first to get to her feet, moving so abruptly that Lejeune was taken by surprise and had to fish his hat from under her heels. She had made for the door without a second glance at the platform or Lydia, but since she had had a seat in the front rows she had become firmly wedged halfway down the hall, where confusion became worse confounded by someone having violent hysteria.

Jason Harmer, on the other hand, had not moved a muscle. He had gone on looking at Lydia with the same pleased interest during and after her staggering announcement as he had shown before. He had made no move to get up until people began to walk over him. Then he rose leisurely, helped a woman to climb over a chair that was blocking her path, patted his pocket to assure himself that something or other was there (his gloves probably), and turned to the door.

It took Jammy several minutes of scientific shoving to reach Marta, wedged in an alcove between two radiators.

"The silly fools!" she said viciously, when Jammy had reminded her who he was. And she glared, with most un-Hallard-like lack of poise, at her fellow beings.

"Nicer with an orchestra pit between, aren't they?"

Marta remembered that these were her public, and he could see her automatically pull herself together. But she was still what Jammy called "het up."

"Amazing business," he said, prompting. And in explanation: "Miss Keats."

"An utterly disgusting exhibition!"

"Disgusting?" said Jammy, at a loss.

"Why doesn't she turn cartwheels in the Strand?"

"You think this was just a publicity stunt?"

"What do you call it? A sign from Heaven?"

"But you said yourself, Miss Hallard, that night you were so kind as to put up with me, that she isn't a quack. That she really ___"

"Of course she isn't a quack! She has done some amazing horoscopes. But that is a very different matter from this finding of murderers at a penny a time. If Lydia doesn't take care," she said after a pause and with venom, "she will end by being an Aimee McPherson!"

It occurred to Jammy that this was hardly the line he had expected Marta to hand out. He didn't know what he had expected. But somehow it wasn't this. Into the pause that his doubt made, she said in a new crisp tone:

"This isn't by any chance an interview, is it, Mr. Hopkins? Because if so, please understand quite clearly that I have said none of these things."

"All right, Miss Hallard, you haven't said a word. Unless the police ask me, of course," he added, smiling.

"I don't think the police are on speaking terms with you," she said. "And now, if you will be so kind as to stand a little to your left, I think I can get past you into that space over there."

She nodded to him, smiled a little, pushed her scented person past him into the place of vantage, and was swallowed up in the crowd.

"Not a ha'penny change!" said Jammy to himself. And ruefully began to push his way back to where he had last seen Jason Harmer. Dowagers cursed him and debutantes glared, but half Jammy's life had been spent in getting through crowds. He made a good job of it.

"And what do you think of this, Mr. Harmer?"

Jason eyed him in a good-humored silence. "How much?" he said at last.

"How much what?"

"How much for my golden words?"

"A free copy of the paper."

Jason laughed, then his face grew sober. "Well, I think it has been a most instructive afternoon. You believe in this star stuff?" "Can't say I do."

"Me, I'm not so sure. There's a lot in that crack about more things in heaven and earth whatever-it-is. I've seen some funny things happen in the village where I was born. Witchcraft and that. No accounting for any of it by any natural means. Makes you wonder."

"Where was that?"

Jason looked suddenly startled for the first time that afternoon. "East of Europe," he said abruptly. And went on: "That Miss Keats, she's a wonder. Not a canny thing to have around the house, though. No, sir! Must spoil your chances of matrimony quite a bit to be able to see what's going to happen. To say nothing of what has been happening. Every man has a right to his alibis."

Was no one, thought Jammy in exasperation, going to take the expected line of country this afternoon! Perhaps if he pushed his way into Lydia's presence, she at least would behave according to the pattern he had marked out for her.

"You believe that Miss Keats was genuinely feeling the presence of evil when she made that statement?" he pursued

hopefully.

"Sure, sure!" Jason looked a little surprised. "You don't make a fool of yourself that way unless you're pretty worked up."

"I noticed you weren't very surprised by the statement."

"I been in the States fifteen years. Nothing surprises me anymore. Ever seen Holy Rollers? Ever seen Coney Island? Ever seen a tramp trying to sell a gold mine? Go west, young man, go west!"
"I'm going home to bed," said Jammy, and took his pushing way through the crowd.

But by the time he had reached the vestibule, he had recovered a little. He adjusted his collar and waited to see the crowd move past. Once outside the inner door, and breathing the secure air of Wigmore Street, they recovered from their fright and broke with one accord into excited speech.

But Jammy gleaned little from their unguarded chatter.

And then over their heads he saw a face that made him pause. A fair face with light lashes and the look of a rather kind terrier. He knew that man. His name was Sanger. And the last time he had seen him was sitting at a desk in Scotland Yard.

So Grant had had a little imagination after all!

Jammy flung his hat disgustedly on and went out to think things over.

Grant had imagination, yes. But it was not Jammy's kind. It would never have occurred to him to waste the time of a perfectly good detective by sending him to look at an audience for two hours. Sanger was at the Elwes Hall because his job for the moment was to tail Jason Harmer.

He brought back an account of the afternoon's drama, and reported that Harmer had been, as far as he could see, quite unmoved. He, Jason, had been accosted by Hopkins from the *Clarion* directly afterwards; but Hopkins didn't seem to get very far with him.

"Yes?" said Grant, lifting an eyebrow. "If he's a match for Hopkins, we must begin to consider him again. Cleverer than I thought!" And Sanger grinned.

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On Wednesday afternoon Mr. Erskine telephoned to say that the fish had bitten. What he said, of course, was that "the line of investigation suggested by Inspector Grant had, it would appear, proved unexpectedly successful," but what he meant was that the fish had risen. Would Grant come along as soon as he could to inspect a document which Mr. Erskine was anxious to show him?

Grant would! In twelve minutes he was in the little green-lighted room.

Erskine, his hand trembling a little more than usual, gave him a letter to read.

Sir,

Having seen your advertisement saying that if Herbert Gotobed will call at your office he will hear of something to his advantage, I beg to state that I am unable to come personally but if you will communicate your news to me by letter to 5, Threadle Street, Canterbury, I will get the letter.

Yours faithfully, HERBERT GOTOBED

"Canterbury!" Grant's eyes lighted. He handled the letter lovingly. The paper was cheap, and the ink poor. The style and the writing vaguely illiterate. Grant remembered Christine's letter with its easy sentences and its individual hand, and marveled for the thousandth time at the mystery of breeding.

"Canterbury! It's almost too good to be true. An accommodation address. I wonder why? Is our Herbert 'wanted,' by any chance? The Yard certainly don't know him. Not by that name. Pity we haven't got a photograph of him."

"And what is our next move, Inspector?"

"You write saying that if he doesn't put in a personal appearance you have no guarantee that he is Herbert Gotobed, and that it is therefore necessary for him to come to your offices!"

"Yes. Yes, certainly. That would be quite in order."

As if it mattered a hoot whether it was in order, Grant thought. How did these fellows imagine criminals were caught? Not by wondering what would be in order, that was certain!

"If you post it straightaway, it will be in Canterbury tonight. I'll go down tomorrow morning and be waiting for the bird when he arrives. May I use your telephone?"

He called the Yard and asked, "Are you sure that none of the list of 'wanted' men has a passion for preaching or otherwise indulging in theatricality?"

The Yard said no, only Holy Mike, and everyone in the force had known him for years. He was reported from Plymouth, by the way.

"How appropriate!" Grant said, and hung up. "Strange!" he said to Erskine. "If he isn't wanted, why lie low? If he has nothing on his conscience—no, he hasn't a conscience. I mean, if we have nothing on him, I should have thought the same lad would have been in your office by return of post. He'd do almost anything for money. Clay knew where to hurt him when she left him that shilling."

"Lady Edward was a shrewd judge of character. She had, I think, been brought up in a hard school, and the fact helped her to discriminate."

Grant asked if he had known her well.

"No, I regret to say, no. A very charming woman. A little impatient of orthodox form, but otherwise—"

Yes. Grant could almost hear her saying, "And in plain English what does that mean?" She, too, must have suffered from Mr. Erskine.

Grant took his leave, warned Williams to be ready to accompany him next morning to Canterbury, arranged for a substitute in the absence of them both, and went home and slept for ten hours. In the morning, very early, he and Williams left a London not yet awake and arrived in a Canterbury shrouded in the smoke of breakfast.

The accommodation address proved to be, as Grant had expected, a small newsagent in a side street. Grant considered it, and said: "I don't suppose our friend will show up this end of the day, but one never knows. You go across to the pub over the way, engage that room above the saloon door, and have breakfast sent up to you. Don't leave the window, and keep an eye on everyone who comes. I'm going inside. When I want you I'll sign from the shop window."

"Aren't you going to have breakfast, sir?"

"I've had it. You can order lunch for one o'clock, though. It doesn't look the kind of place that would have a chop in the house."

Grant lingered until he saw Williams come to the upper window. Then he turned into the small shop. A round bald man with a heavy black mustache was transferring cartons of cigarettes from a cardboard box to a glass case.

"Good morning. Are you Mr. Rickett?"

"That's me," Mr. Rickett said, with caution.

"I understand that you sometimes use these premises as an accommodation address?"

Mr. Rickett looked him over. His experienced eye asked, Customer or police? and decided correctly.

"And what if I do? Nothing wrong in that, is there?"

"Not a thing!" Grant answered cheerfully. "I wanted to know whether you knew a Mr. Herbert Gotobed?"

"This a joke?'

"Certainly not. He gave your shop as an address for letters, and I wondered if you knew him."

"Not me. I don't take no interest in the people who has letters. They pay their fee when they come for them, and that finishes it as far as I am concerned."

"I see. Well, I want you to help me. I want you to let me stay in your shop until Mr. Gotobed comes to claim his letter. You have a letter for him?"

"Yes, I have a letter. It came last night. But—you police?"

"Scotland Yard," Grant showed his credentials.

"Yes. Well, I don't want no arrests on my premises. This is a respectable business, this is, even if I do a little on the side. I don't want no bad name hanging around my business."

Grant assured him that no arrest was contemplated. All he wanted was to meet Mr. Gotobed. He wanted information from him.

Oh, well, if that was all.

So Grant was established behind the little tower of cheap editions at the end of the counter, and found the morning passing not so slowly as he had feared. Humanity, even after all his years in the force, still had a lively interest in Grant's eyes—except in moments of depression—and interest proved plentiful. It was Williams, watching a very ordinary small-town street, who was bored. He welcomed the half hour of conversation behind the books when Grant went to lunch, and went back reluctantly to the frowsy room above the saloon. The long summer afternoon, clouded and warm, wore away into a misty evening, and a too early dusk. The first lights appeared, very pale in the daylight.

"What time do you close?" Grant asked anxiously.

"Oh, tennish."

There was still plenty of time.

And then, about half-past nine, Grant became aware of a presence in the shop. There had been no warning of footsteps, no announcement at all except a swish of drapery. Grant looked up to see a man in monk's garb.

A high-pitched peevish voice said, "You have a letter addressed to Mr. Herbert-"

A light movement on Grant's part called attention to his presence.

Without a moment's pause the man turned and disappeared, leaving his sentence unfinished.

The apparition had been so unexpected, the disappearance so abrupt, that it was a second or two before mortal wits could cope with the situation. But Grant was out of the shop before the stranger was more than a few yards down the street. He saw the figure turn into an alley, and he ran. It was a little back court of two-story houses, all the doors open to the warm evening, and two transverse alleys leading out of it. The man had disappeared. He turned to find Williams, a little breathless, at his back.

"Good man!" he said. "But it isn't much use. You take that alley and I'll take this one. A monk of sorts!"

"I saw him!" Williams said, making off.

But it was no good. In ten minutes they met at the newsagent's, blank.

"Who was that?" Grant demanded of Mr. Rickett. "Don't know. Never saw him before as far as I know."

"Is there a monastery here?"

"In Canterbury? No!"

"Well, in the district?"

"Not as I knows."

A woman behind them put down sixpence on the counter. "Goldflake," she said. "You looking for a monastery? There's that brotherhood place in Bligh Vennel. They're by way of being monks. Ropes around their middles and bare heads."

"Where is—what is it? Bligh Vennel?" Grant asked. "Far from here?"

"No. 'Bout two streets. Less as the crow flies, but that won't be much good to you in Canterbury. It's in the lanes behind the Cock and Pheasant. I'd show you myself, if Jim wasn't waiting for his smoke. A sixpenny packet, Mr. Rickett, please."

"After hours," said Mr. Rickett, gruffly, avoiding the detective's eye. The woman's confidence was a conviction in itself.

She looked surprised, and before she should commit herself further Grant pulled his own cigarette case from his pocket. "Madam, they say a nation gets the laws it deserves. It is not in my weak power to obtain the sixpenny packet for you, but please let me repay your help by providing Jim's smoke." He poured his cigarettes into her astonished hands, and dismissed her, protesting.

"And now," he said to Rickett, "about this brotherhood or whatever it is. Do you know it?"

"No. There is such a thing, now I remember. But I don't know where they hang out. You heard what she said. Behind the Cock and Pheasant. Half the cranks in the world has branches here, if it comes to that. I'm shutting up now."

"I should," Grant said. "People wanting cigarettes are a nuisance."

Mr. Rickett growled.

"Come on, Williams. And remember, Rickett, not a word of this to anyone. You'll probably see us tomorrow."

Rickett was understood to say that if he never saw them again it would be too soon.

"This is a rum go, sir," Williams said, as they set off down the street. "What's the program now?"

"I'm going to call on the brotherhood. I don't think you had better come along, Williams. Your good healthy Worcestershire face doesn't suggest any yearning after the life ascetic."

"You mean I look like a cop. I know, sir. It's worried me often. Bad for business. You don't know how I envy you your looks, sir. People think 'Army' the minute they see you. It's a great help always to be taken for Army."

"Considering all the dud checks on Cox's, I find that surprising! No, I wasn't considering your looks, Williams, not that way. I was just talking 'thoughtless.' It's a one-man party, this. You'd better go back to the aspidistra and wait for me. Have a meal."

They found the place after some search. A row of first-story windows looked down upon the alley, but the only opening on the ground floor was a narrow door, heavy and studded. The building apparently faced into a court or garden. There was neither plate nor inscription at the door to give information to the curious. But there was a bell.

Grant rang, and after a long pause there was the sound, faint through the heavy door, of footsteps on a stone floor. A small grill in the door shot back, and a man asked Grant's business.

Grant asked to see the principal.

"Whom do you wish to see?"

"The principal," said Grant firmly. He didn't know whether they called their Number One abbot or prior; principal seemed to him good enough.

"The Reverend Father does not give audience at this hour."

"Will you give the Reverend Father my card," Grant said, handing the little square through the grill, "and tell him that I shall be grateful if he would see me on a matter of importance."

"No worldly matter is of importance."

"The Reverend Father may decide differently when you have given him my card."

The grill shot back with an effect which might in a community less saintly have been described as snappish, and Grant was left in the darkening street. Williams saluted silently from some paces' distance and turned away. The distant voices of children playing came clearly from adjoining streets, but there was no traffic in the alley. Williams's footsteps had faded out of hearing long before there was the sound of returning ones in the passage beyond the door. Then there was the creak of bolts being drawn and a key turned. (What did they shut out? Grant wondered. Life? Or were the bars to keep straying wills indoors?) The door was opened sufficiently to admit him, and the man bade him enter.

"Peace be with you and with all Christian souls and the blessing of the Lord God go with you now and for ever, amen," gabbled the man as he shot the bolts again and turned the key. If he had hummed a line of "Sing to Me Sometimes" the effect would have been exactly similar, Grant thought.

"The Reverend Father in his graciousness will see you," the man said, and led the way up the stone passage, his sandals slapping with a slovenly effect on the flags. He ushered Grant into a small whitewashed room, bare except for a table, chairs, and a Crucifix, said "Peace be with you," and shut the door, leaving Grant alone. It was very chilly there, and Grant hoped that the Reverend Father would not discipline him by leaving him there too long.

But in less than five minutes the doorkeeper returned and with great impressiveness bowed in his principal. He uttered another of his gabbled benedictions and left the two men together. Grant had expected the fanatic type; he was confronted instead with the successful preacher; bland, entrenched, worldly.

"Can I help you, my son?"

"I think you have in your brotherhood a man of the name of Herbert Gotobed—"

"There is no one of that name here."

"I had not expected that that was the name he is known by in your community, but you are no doubt aware of the real names of the men who enter your order."

"The worldly name of a man is forgotten on the day he enters the door to become one of us."

"You asked if you could help me."

"I still wish to help you."

"I want to see Herbert Gotobed. I have news for him."

"I know of no one of that name. And there can be no 'news' for a man who has joined the Brotherhood of the Tree of Lebanon."

"Very well. You may not know the man as Gotobed. But the man I want to interview is one of your number. I have to ask that you will let me find him."

"Do you suggest that I should parade my community for your inspection?"

"No. You have some kind of service to which all the brothers come, haven't you?"

"Certainly."

"Let me be present at the service."

"It is a most unusual request."

"When is the next service?"

"In half an hour the midnight service begins."

"Then all I ask is a seat where I can see the faces of your community."

The Reverend Father was reluctant, and mentioned the inviolability of the holy house, but Grant's casually dropped phrases on the attractive but obsolete custom of sanctuary and the still-surviving magic of King's Writ, made him change his mind.

"By the way, will you tell me—I'm afraid I'm very ignorant of your rules and ways of life—do the members of your community have business in the town?"

"No. Only when charity demands it."

"Have the brothers no traffic with the world at all then?" Herbert was going to have a perfect alibi, if that were so!

"For twenty-four hours once every moon, a brother goes into the world. That is contrived lest the unspottedness of communal life should breed self-righteousness. For the twelve hours of the day he must help his fellow beings in such ways as are open to him. For the twelve hours of the night he must meditate in a place alone: in summer in some open place, in winter in some church."

"I see. And the twenty-four hours begin-when?"

"From a midnight to a midnight."

"Thank you."

The service was held in a bare chapel, candlelit and whitewashed, very simple except for the magnificence of the altar at the east gable. Grant was surprised by the appearance of the altar. Poor the brothers might be, but there was wealth somewhere. The vessels on the white velvet cloth, and the Crucifix, might have been a pirate's loot from a Spanish American cathedral. He had found it difficult to associate the Herbert Gotobed he knew by reputation with this cloistered and poverty-struck existence. Being theatrical to no audience but oneself must soon pall. But the sight of that altar gave him pause. Herbert was perhaps running true to form after all.

Grant heard no word of the service. From his seat in the dim recess of a side window he could see all the faces of the participants; more than a score of them; and he found it a fascinating study. Some were cranks (one saw the faces at "anti" meetings and folk-dance revivals), some fanatics (masochists looking for a modern hair shirt), some simple, some at odds with themselves and looking for peace, some at odds with the world and looking for sanctuary. Grant, looking them over with a lively interest, found his glance stayed as it came to one face. Now what had brought the owner of that face to a life of seclusion and self-denial? A round sallow face on a round ill-shaped head, the eyes small, the nose fleshly, the lower lip loose, so that it hung away from his teeth as he repeated the words of the service. All the others in that little chapel had been types that fitted easily into recognized niches in the everyday world; the principal to a bishopric, this one to a neurologist's waiting room, this to a depot for unemployed. But where did that last one fit?

There was only one answer. In the dock.

"So that," said Grant's otherself to him, "is Herbert Gotobed." He could not be sure, of course, until he had seen the man walk. That was all he had ever seen of him: his walk. But he was ready to stake much on his judgment. The best of judges were at fault sometimes—Gotobed might turn out to be that lean and harmless-looking individual in the front row—but he would be surprised if Gotobed were any but that unctuous creature with the loose lower lip.

As the men filed out after midnight, he had no more doubt. Gotobed had a peculiar walk, a gangling, shoulder-rotating progression which was quite his own.

Grant followed them out and then sought the Reverend Father. What was the name of the last man to leave the chapel?

That was Brother Aloysius.

And after a little persuasion Brother Aloysius was sent for.

As they waited Grant talked conventionally of the Order and its rules and learned that no member could own any worldly property or have communication for worldly purposes with human beings. Such trivial worldlinesses as newspapers were, of course, not even thought of. He also learned that the principal intended in about a month's time to take over a new Mission in Mexico, which they had built out of their funds, and that the privilege of electing his successor lay entirely with him.

A thought occurred to Grant.

- "I don't want to be impertinent—please don't think this idle curiosity—but would you tell me whether you have decided in your mind on any particular person?"
 - "I have practically decided."
 - "May I know who it is?"
- "I really do not know why I should tell to a stranger what I am not prepared to tell to the brothers of my own Order, but there is no reason to conceal it if I may trust your secrecy." Grant gave his word. "My successor is likely to be the man you have asked to see."
 - "But he is a newcomer!" Grant said before he thought.
- "I am at a loss to know how you knew that," the Reverend Father said sharply. "It is true Brother Aloysius has been with us only a few months, but the qualities necessary for the priorship" (so he was a prior!) "are not developed with length of service."

Grant murmured agreement, and then asked which of their community had been on an errand in the streets this evening.

None of them, the prior said firmly; and the conversation was brought to an end by the entrance of the man Grant wanted.

He stood there passively, his hands folded within the wide sleeves of his dark brown gown. Grant noticed that his feet were not sandaled but bare, and remembered that there had been no warning of his approach when he had presented himself in the newsagent's. The looker-on in Grant wondered whether it was an appearance of humility or the convenience of a noiseless tread which appealed so greatly to Herbert.

"This is Brother Aloysius," the prior said, and left them with a blessing, a much more poetic performance than the doorkeeper's.

- "I am from Messrs. Erskine, Smythe, and Erskine, the lawyers in the Temple," Grant said. "You are Herbert Gotobed."
- "I am Brother Aloysius."
- "You were Herbert Gotobed."
- "I never heard of him."

Grant considered him for a moment. "I'm sorry," he said. "We're looking for Gotobed about a legacy that has been left him." "Yes? If he is a brother of this Order, your news will be of little interest to him."

"If the legacy were big enough, he might realize that he could do far more for the cause of charity outside these walls than in

them."

"Our oath is for life. Nothing that happens outside these walls is of interest to any member of our Order."

"So you deny that you are Herbert Gotobed?"

Grant was conducting the conversation automatically. What his mind was occupied with, he found, was that the expression in the man's small pale eyes was hate. He had rarely seen such hate. But why hate? That was what his mind asked. It should be fear, surely?

Grant felt that to this man he was not a pursuer but someone who had butted in. The feeling stayed with him while he took his leave and all the way back to the hotel opposite the tobacconist's.

Williams was brooding over a cold meal he had caused to be set for his superior.

"Any news?" Grant asked.

"No, sir."

"No word of Tisdall? Have you telephoned?"

"Yes, I telephoned about twenty minutes ago. Not a word, sir."

Grant slapped some slices of ham between two pieces of bread. "Pity," he said. "I'd work much better if Tisdall were out of my mind. Come on. There isn't going to be much bed for us tonight."

"What is it, sir? Did you find him?"

"Yes, he's there all right. Denied he was Gotobed. They're not allowed to have any worldly transactions. That is why he was so shy in the shop. Didn't even wait to see who the second person behind the counter was: just fled at the very prospect of a watcher. That's what's worrying me, Williams. He seems much more occupied with not being chucked out of the order than with being run in for murder."

"But his running out of the shop might have been because he wanted to keep on in hiding. That monastery place is as good a hideout as a murderer could wish for."

"Ye-s. Yes, but he's not frightened. He's angry. We're spoiling something for him."

They had been going quietly downstairs, Grant eating large mouthfuls of his improvised sandwich. As they approached the ground floor they were confronted by an enormous female who blocked their exit from the stairway. She had no poker in her hand, but the effect was the same.

"So that's what you are!" she said, with concentrated venom. "A couple of sneaking fly-by-nights. Come in here, as large as life, you do, and make me and my poor husband buy the best of everything for your meals—chops at tenpence each, and tongue at two-and-eightpence the pound, to say nothing of English tomatoes to suit your very particular tastes—and all we get for our expense and our trouble is a couple of empty rooms in the morning. I've a good mind to ring up the police and give you in charge—if it weren't for—"

"Oh, for God's sake!" Grant said angrily; and then began to laugh. He hung over the banisters laughing helplessly, while Williams talked to the angry hostess.

"Well, why didn't you say you were bobbies?" she said.

"We're not bobbies," Williams said, ferociously, and Grant laughed the more, and dragged him from the scene.

"Gilbertian!" he said, wiping his eyes. "Quite Gilbertian. Did me a lot of good. Now, listen. These monks, or whatever they esteem themselves, retire to their cells at midnight and don't move out of them till six. But Herbert gets in and out of that building more or less when he likes. I don't know how he works it: those first-floor windows are low enough to drop from but much too high to get back into, and he doesn't look like a gymnast. But get out he does. No one knew—or at least, the powers that be didn't know—he was out tonight. Well, I have a hunch that he's going walking again tonight, and I want to see where to."

"What makes you think so, sir?"

"Just instinct. If I were Herbert I'd have a base to conduct operations from. I walked around the block before I came back to the hotel. There are only two points where the monastery property abuts on the street. At the side where the door is; and at the very opposite side where the garden ends in a wall that looks fifteen feet high. There's a small gate there; iron and very solid. It's a long way from the living quarters, and I think our original side is the most helpful. But I want you to keep watch on the garden side, and tail anyone who comes out. I'll do the same on the door side. If nothing happens by six o'clock you can creep home and go to bed."

Grant had been waiting for what seemed an eternity. The night was soft, with a damp air, and smelled pleasantly of green things and flowers. Somewhere there was a lime tree. There was no sky, only a thick misty dark above. Bells chimed every now and then, with aloof sweetness. In spite of himself, Grant found the peace of the night invading him; his mind grew blurred and incurious and he had to whip it to wakefulness.

And then, a few moments after half-past two had struck, something happened, and his mind leaped without any goading. He had heard no sound, but in the lane in front of the monastery there was movement. It was too dark to see a shape; all that happened was that the darkness moved, as a curtain might stir in a current of air. Someone was in the street.

Grant waited. The movement grew less, became more blurred, and ceased. Whoever was there had moved away from him. Grant slipped his unlaced boots from his feet and strung them across his shoulder; every step on a shod foot would be audible on a night like this. Silently he moved down the lane and past the high wall of the house. Out of its shadows the visibility was slightly better: he could see the movement in front of him again. He followed it with every sense alert; it was not only difficult to gauge his exact distance from it, but almost impossible to tell if it stopped for a moment. In the street beyond it was easier; the movement in the darkness became a form. A form retreating swiftly and effortlessly into the night. Grant set out to keep pace with it. Down the little streets of two-story houses. Past small houses with small gardens. Past an occasional small paddock.

And then Grant felt gravel pavement under his stocking feet and cursed. The man was making for the country; for the outer suburbs at least.

For about twenty minutes Grant followed that half-seen figure through a dark and silent world. He did not know his surrounding; he had to follow the figure blindly. He did not know when a step came, or a declivity, or an obstacle. And a bad stumble might be fatal to the night's work. But as far as he could see, his quarry never hesitated. This was not a flight; it was a journey he had done often before.

Presently Grant could tell that they were in more or less open country. If there were houses they were built behind the original field hedges—a new suburb, probably. The hedges made it difficult to see the man he was following; their dark mass made a gloomy background for a moving figure. And then Grant suddenly found that he had lost him. Nothing moved in front of him anymore. He stood still instantly. Was the man waiting for him? Or had he disappeared into an opening? Several times, when pebbles had slid under his own tread, he had wondered if the man suspected his presence. There had been as far as he could see no pause for reconnoitering in the man's progress. But now there was a complete absence of any movement at all.

Grant went forward step by step, and found himself level with an opening in the hedge. A gate. He wished passionately that he could use his torch. This blindfold moving through an unknown country was getting on his nerves. He decided to risk a guess that this was where the man had gone, and moved into the entrance. Immediately there was soft sand under his feet. He paused doubtfully. Was it only a sandpit? What was the man planning? An attack?

Then he remembered that fine red sand which decorates the trim approaches to new villas, and breathed again. Reassured he moved forward, finding with one foot the cut edge of turf, and letting it lead him to the building which must be in front of him somewhere. It loomed quite suddenly in the darkness. A whitewashed house of perhaps eight rooms. Its paleness made it slightly luminous even on so dark a night; and against its ghostly shimmer he saw the man again. He was standing still, and it seemed to Grant that he was looking back at him. He realized too late that he too was now standing where a wing of the house made a background for him. He dropped to his knees. And after a moment the man moved on and vanished round the corner of the house.

Grant made the best of his way to the corner and waited, pressed up against the wall. But there was no sound, no breathing, not a movement; the man had gone on; he was wasting time. He stepped around the corner. A soft wool substance smothered him, falling over his face and being drawn tightly about his neck. A split second before the folds closed on his throat, he got his fingers between the stuff and his flesh. He held on with all his might, and then, using the material as purchase, bent forward abruptly and felt the man's body come sliding over him, head first to the ground. The weight knocked Grant down, and the vile suffocating thing was still over his head, but his hands were free. He reached out for his opponent and felt with passionate gladness the restriction around his throat relax. He was still blind and suffocating, but he was in no immediate danger of being throttled. He was, in fact, doing his best to throttle the other man, if only he could find his throat. But the man was twisting like an eel, and using his knees with malicious art. This was not the first time that Herbert Gotobed had fought foul. Grant wished, hitting blindly and finding only seed-sown grass, that he could see for just thirty seconds. He let go the part of his assailant he happened to be holding—he was not sure whether it was a leg or an arm—and did his best to roll away. It was not successful, since the man had just as firm a grip of him. But he had time to reach into his pocket and close his fingers around his torch. His hand was prisoned there as he was rolled onto his back, but with all his might Grant hit with the free hand into the breath that was sobbing into his face. His knuckles hit bone and he heard the snap of teeth meeting. The man's full weight descended on him. He wrenched himself free from it, and dragged the torch from his pocket. Before he had got it out, the man was moving again. He had only rocked him. He flashed the torch on him, and before the light had reached his face the man leaped. Grant stepped aside and swung the weapon at him as he came. It missed him by a hair's breadth and they went down together. Grant lacked stance for the reception of such a weight: all his attention had been on his own blow; he hit the ground with violence. In the dimness of the moment, when all his faculties were trying to summon his stunned body to its duty, he wondered detachedly how the man would kill him.

To his surprise he felt the weight of the man's body lift, something hit him across the side of the head, and he was aware, even while his ears sang, that the man had gone from his side.

He dragged himself to a sitting position; sitting, incidentally, on the stone he had been hit with (by its feel its proper place was a rockery), and was groping for his torch preparatory to following the man, when a woman's voice said out of the dark in a whisper:

"Is that you, Bert? Is anything wrong?"

Grant's hand lighted on the torch, and he got to his feet.

The light shone into eyes big and brown and soft as a deer's. But the rest of the face was not soft.

She drew in her breath as the light flashed, and made a movement backwards.

"Stay still," said Grant in a voice that brooked no disobedience, and the movement ceased.

"Don't talk so loud," she said urgently. "Who are you, anyway? I thought you were—a friend of mine."

"I'm a detective inspector—a policeman."

This statement, Grant had found, produced invariably one of two expressions: fear or wariness. Quite innocent people often showed the first; but the second was a giveaway. It gave away the woman now.

Grant's light flashed on the house—a one-story building with small attic rooms.

"Don't do that!" she hissed. "You'll waken her.'

"Who is 'her'?"

"The old lady. My boss."

"You a maid here?"

"I'm the housekeeper."

"Just the two of you in the house?"

"Yes."

He indicated with his light the open window behind her. "Is that your room?"

"Ves

"We'll go in there and talk."

"You can't come into the house. you can't do anything to me. I haven't done anything."

"Would you mind!" said Grant, in a tone that belied the meaning of the phrase.

"You can't come into the house without a warrant. I know!" She was standing against the windowsill now, defending her rooms.

"You don't need a warrant for murder," Grant said.

"Murder!" She stared at him. "What have I to do with murder?"

"Will you get in, please, and put on the light?"

She did as she was bidden, climbing over the sill with the ease of practice. As the light clicked, Grant stepped over the sill and drew the curtains.

It was a very pleasant bedroom, with eiderdown on the bed and shaded light on the table.

"Who is your employer?" he asked.

She gave her employer's name, and admitted that she had been there only a few months.

"Where was your last reference from?"

"A place in Australia."

"And what relation are you to Herbert Gotobed?"

"Who's that?"

"Come, don't let's waste time, Miss—What name do you use, by the way?"

"I use my own name," she glared at him. "Rosa Freeson."

Grant tilted the lamp for a better view of her. He had never seen her before. "Herbert Gotobed came out here to see you tonight and you were waiting for him. You will save yourself a lot of trouble if you tell me all about it, now."

"I was waiting, if you must know, for Bert. He's the milk roundsman. You can't run me in for that. You can't blame me much, either. A girl has to have a little fun in a place like this."

"Yes?" He moved toward the built-in wardrobe. "Stay where you are," he said.

The wardrobe held nothing but women's clothes; rather too good for her position but none of them very new. Grant asked to see the contents of the chest of drawers, and she showed them sullenly. They were all quite normal. He asked where her boxes were.

"In the box room in the attic," she said.

"And what are the suitcases under the bed?"

She looked ready to strike him.

"Let me see what is in these."

"You have no right! Show me your warrant. I won't open anything for you."

"If you have nothing to hide, you can't possibly object to my seeing what is inside."

"I've lost the key."

"You're making me very suspicious."

She produced the key from a string around her neck and pulled out the first suitcase. Grant, watching her, thought for the first time that she was not all white. Something in her movements, in the texture of her hair, was—what? Negro? Indian? And then he remembered the South Sea Mission which Herbert had run.

- "How long since you left the Islands?" he asked conversationally.
- "About—" She stopped, and finished immediately, "I don't know what you're talking about."
- The first suitcase was empty. The second was full to the brim with men's clothes.
- "Male impersonator?" asked Grant, who in spite of his swollen feet and aching head was beginning to feel happier. "Or just old clothes dealer?"
 - "These are the clothes of my dead fiancé. I'll thank you not to be funny about them."
 - "Didn't your fiancé wear a coat?"
 - "Yes, but it was mussed up when he was killed."
 - "Oh? How was he killed?" Grant asked amiably, his hands running through the clothes.
 - "Motor accident."
 - "You disappoint me."
 - "Come again?"
 - "I'd expected a more imaginative end from you. What was your fiancé's name?"
 - "John Starboard."
 - "Starboard! That cancels out the motor accident."
 - "I suppose you know what you're talking about. I don't."
 - "It wasn't your fiancé's coat you kept in that now empty suitcase, by any chance?"
 - "It was not."

Grant's searching hand paused. He withdrew it holding a bundle of passports: four in all. One was a British one issued to Herbert Gotobed; one was an American one in the name of Alexander Byron Black; one a Spanish one, issued to a deaf-mute, one José Fernandez; and the fourth an American one for William Cairns Black and his wife. But the photographs were all of the same man: Herbert Gotobed; and the wife's photograph was that of Rosa Freeson.

- "A collector, your fiancé. An expensive hobby, I've always understood." He put the passports into his pocket.
- "You can't do that. They're not yours. I'll scream the house down. I will say you came in and attacked me. Look!" She pulled her wrap open and began to tear her nightdress.

"Scream as much as you like. Your old lady would be very interested in these passports. And if you have any designs on the old lady, by the way, I should advise you to reconsider them. Now I shall retrieve my boots. They are lying somewhere in the garden. Though God alone knows if my feet will go into them. My advice to you, Mrs. Cairns Black, is to do nothing at all until you hear from me. We have nothing against *you*, so far, so don't begin putting ideas into our heads by doing anything you might regret."

Grant managed to get his boots on (by dint of thinking strenuously of something else, his childhood's recipe for painful moments), but after two or three steps hastily took them off again, and hobbled homeward as he had come: stocking-soled. It was not easy to find his way back, but he had an excellent bump of locality (it was said at the Yard that if you blindfolded Grant and turned him until he was dizzy he still knew where north was) and the general direction was clear enough to him. He stood in a doorway on the opposite side of the street and watched the officer on the beat go by, rather than ask a direction and have to explain himself. No member of the C.I.D. likes to appear before a borough policeman with his boots in his hands.

He wrote a note asking Williams to telephone the Yard when he came in at six and ask for any information they might have about a sect or order or whatnot called the Tree of Lebanon, and to waken him when the answer came. He then fell into bed, and slept dreamlessly, the passports under his pillow until Williams called him just before ten o'clock.

"News of Tisdall?" Grant said as his eyes opened.

But there was no news.

The Yard said that the Holy Order of the Tree of Lebanon had been founded by a rich bachelor in 1862, for the furtherance of the monastic life, he having been what was then known as jilted by the object of his affections. He himself had been the first prior, and all his wealth had been used to endow the foundation. The rule of poverty had been very strict, money being used only for charities approved by the prior of the moment, so that by the present day the order had the reputation of having a lot of money laid away. A prior was nominated by his predecessor, but a prior could be superseded at any moment by the unanimous vote of the brethren.

Grant drank the horrible coffee supplied by the establishment, and considered things. "That is what our Herbert wants: the priorship. He has the prior dancing on a stick. It's almost incredible that a man like the prior could be such a fool. But then! Think of the fools we've known, Williams."

"I'm thinking, sir," Williams said, eloquently.

"All those hardheaded self-made pieces of original conglomerate who fall for a few honeyed words from a confidence man in a hotel lobby! And of course Herbert has no ordinary gift of tongues. Perhaps he worked his churches in America as leaven to the prior's interest. Anyhow, he's the prior's fair-haired boy at the moment. With the prospect of having a fortune in his hands if he plays his cards rightly for the next few weeks. Not much wonder he was scared of getting in wrong. He wanted to know just how much his sister had left him, without compromising himself with his brethren. If she had left him enough to make it worth his while, he'd give up the monastic life. I shouldn't think it appeals greatly to him. Even with occasional visits to the villa."

"How long do you think he'd stay in any case, sir?"

"Till he had transferred enough hard cash to his own particular charities. Oh, well, these," he indicated the passports, "will be enough to frame a nice little indictment on, so that we can have him under our hands when we want him. The thing that disappoints me, Williams, is where is the murder in all this? I don't mean that he didn't do it. I've no doubt that he was having his twenty-four hours off at the time. But why did he do it? He came to England when he heard that she was coming. I think, judging by his woman's clothes, that he was possibly broke when he arrived. That was why he took to the Tree of Lebanon. But the possibilities of the Tree must have occurred to him pretty soon. Why kill his sister?"

"Went to see her and had a quarrel. The queer hour that's puzzled us all would be quite normal for him. Six o'clock would be just as usual as lunchtime."

"Yes, that's true. I'm going now to find out from the Reverend Father whether Brother Aloysius was out of the monastery a fortnight yesterday. The Reverend Father would have sat on a very high horse yesterday, but he'll talk when he sees what his favorite looks like on these passports."

But the Reverend Father was not receiving callers. The little *guichet* displayed the sour face of the doorkeeper, who delivered his stolid message in answer to all Grant's questions, whether the phrase was relevant or not. Herbert's golden tongue had been at work. The *guichet* shut, and Grant was left helpless in the little lane. There was nothing for it but a warrant. He went slowly away, his feet still aching; admired the job Herbert had made of oiling the cellar entrance in the pavement, and climbed into his car. Yes, he had better get that warrant.

He went back to the hotel for his pajamas, razor, and toothbrush (he had no intention of spending another night there) and was leaving a message for the sleeping Williams, when he was called to the telephone by the Yard.

Would he go to Dover? The man there wanted him. Something had turned up, it seemed.

He changed the message for Williams, threw his things into the car, found time to wonder why he overtipped the frowsy virago for her inattendance, disgusting food, and deplorable cooking, and set out for Dover.

Something had turned up. That could only mean Champneis. Something out of the ordinary. If they had merely found where Champneis had spent the night, it would have been reported by telephone in the ordinary way. But—something had turned up.

Rimell, the detective in charge—a kind, melancholy-looking boy, whose greatest asset was his unlikeness to the popular conception of a detective—was waiting for Grant at that police-station door, and Grant drew him into the car. Rimell said that he had, after endless delving, unearthed an old fellow called Searle, a retired deckhand, who had been coming home from his granddaughter's engagement party about half-past twelve on the Wednesday night—or rather, the Thursday morning. He was

alone, because very few people lived down the harborway nowadays. They'd got ideas and lived up the hill in gimcrack villas you'd be afraid to sneeze in. He had stopped a minute or two when he had got to the sea level, to look at the harbor. It still made him feel fine to look at riding lights at night. It was beginning to mist over, but it was still clear enough to see the outlines of everything. He knew the *Petronel* was coming in—had seen her through his glasses before he went to the party—and so he looked for her now, and saw her lying not at the jetty, but out in the water at anchor. As he watched, a small motorboat came out from her side and made for the shore, going slowly with a quiet *chug-chug* as if not anxious to call attention to itself. As it touched the jetty steps a man moved out of the shadows by the quay. A tall figure whom Searle identified as Lord Edward (he had seen him often and had in fact once served aboard a previous yacht of his brother's) appeared from the boat and said, "Is that you, Harmer?" and the smaller man had said, "It's me," and then, in a low tone, "Customs all right?" Lord Edward had said, "No trouble at all," and they had gone down into the motorboat together and pushed off. The mist had come down quickly after that, blotting out the harbor. After about fifteen minutes Searle had gone on his way. But as he was going up the street, he heard a motorboat leave the *Petronel*. Whether it came ashore or went out of the harbor he didn't know. He didn't think at the moment any of all this was of any importance.

"Great Heavens!" said Grant. "I can't believe it. There just—there just isn't one single thing in all the world that these two men have in common." (His subconscious added before he could stop it: except a woman.) "They just don't touch anywhere. And yet they're as thick as thieves." He sat silent a little. "All right, Rimell. Good work. I'm going to have lunch and think this over."

"Yes, sir. May I give you a friendly piece of advice, sir?"

"If you must. It's a bad habit in subordinates."

"No black coffee, sir. I expect you had four cups for breakfast and nothing else."

Grant laughed. "Why should you worry?" he said, pressing the starter. "The more breakdowns, the quicker the promotion." "I grudge the money for wreaths, sir."

But Grant was not smiling as he drove lunchwards. Christine Clay's husband and her reputed lover had midnight business together. That was strange enough. But that Edward Champneis, fifth son of the seventh Duke of Bude, and a reputable if unorthodox member of his race, should have underhand traffic with Jason Harmer, of Tin Pan Alley, was definitely stranger. What was the common bond? Not murder. Grant refused to consider anything so outré as murder in couples. One or the other might have wanted to murder her, but that they should have forgathered on the subject was unimaginable. The motorboat had left the *Petronel* again, Searle said. Supposing only one of them had been in it? It was only a short distance north along the coast to the Gap at Westover; and Harmer had turned up at Clay's cottage two hours after her death. To drown Clay from a motorboat was the ideal way. As good as his groin theory, with escape both quicker and easier. The more he thought of the motorboat, the more enamored of the method he grew. They had checked the boats in the vicinity as a matter of routine at the time of the first investigation; but a motorboat has a wide cruising radius. But—oh, well, just "but"! The theory was fantastic.

Could one imagine Jason saying, "You lend me your boat and I'll drown your wife," or Champneis suggesting, "I'll lend you the boat if you'll do the work." These two had met for some other reason altogether. If murder had resulted, then it had been unplanned, incidental.

What then had they met for? Harmer had said something about Customs. It had been his first greeting. He had been anxious about it. Was Harmer a drug fiend?

There were two things against that. Harmer didn't look like an addict. And Champneis would never have supplied the stuff. Risk might be the breath of life to him, but that kind of risk would be very definitely out.

What, then, was to be kept from the eyes of the Customs? Tobacco? Jewels? Champneis had shown George Meir, next morning, the topazes he had brought back for Christine.

There was one thing against all of it. Smuggling Edward Champneis might descend to, as a ploy, a mere bit of excitement; but Grant could not see him smuggling for the benefit of Jason Harmer. One ran one's head continually against that. What had these two men in common? They had something. Their association proved it. But what? They were, as far as anyone knew, the merest acquaintances. Not even that. Champneis had almost certainly left England before Harmer had arrived, and Christine had not known Harmer until they worked together on these English pictures.

No digestive juices flowed in Grant's alimentary tracts during that lunch; his brain was working like an engine. The sweet-breads and green peas might as well have been thrown into the chef's waste bin. By the time coffee had arrived he was no nearer a solution. He wished he was one of these marvelous creatures of superinstinct and infallible judgment who adorned the pages of detective stories, and not just a hard-working, well-meaning, ordinarily intelligent Detective Inspector. As far as he could see, the obvious course was to interview one or other of these men. And the obvious one to interview was Harmer. Why? Oh, because he'd talk more easily. Oh, yes, all right, and because there was less chance of running into trouble! What it was to have someone inside you checking up your motives for everything you did or thought!

He refrained from his second cup of coffee, with a smile for the absent Rimell. Nice kid. He'd make a good detective someday.

He rang up Devonshire House, and asked if Mr. Harmer could make it convenient to see Alan Grant (no need to advertise his profession) this evening between tea and dinner.

He was told that Mr. Harmer was not in London. He had gone down to see Leni Primhofer, the continental star, who was staying at Whitecliffe. He was writing a song for her. No, he was not expected back that night. The address was Tall Hatch, Whitecliffe, and the telephone number Whitecliffe 3025.

Grant rang Whitecliffe 3025, and asked when Mr. Harmer could see him. Harmer was in the country motoring with Fraülein Primhofer and would not be back before dinner.

Whitecliffe is a continuation of Westover: a collection of plutocratic villas set on the cliff beyond the cries of trippers and the desecration of blown newspaper pages. Grant still had a room at the Marine, and so to Westover he went, and there Williams

joined him. All he could do now was to wait for a warrant from the Yard and a visit from Harmer.

It was cocktail time when Harmer presented himself.

"Are you asking me to dinner, Inspector? If not, say you are and let the dinner be on me, will you; there's a good sport. Another hour of that woman and I shall be daffy. Loco. Nuts. I have known stars in my time, but holy mackerel! she takes the cake. You'd think with her English being on the sticky side that she'd let up now and then to think a bit. But no! Jabbers right along, with German to fill in, and bits of French dressing here and there to make it look nice. Waiter! What's yours, Inspector? Not drinking? Oh, come on! No? That's too bad. One gin and mixed, waiter. You don't need to climb on the wagon with a waist like that, Inspector. Don't say you're Prohibition from conviction!"

Grant disclaimed any crusading interest in the drink traffic.

"Well, what's the news? You have got news, haven't you?" He became serious, and looked earnestly, at Grant. "Something real turned up?"

"I just wanted to know what you were doing in Dover on that Wednesday night."

"In Dover?"

"A fortnight last Wednesday."

"Someone been pulling your leg?"

"Listen, Mr. Harmer, your lack of frankness is complicating everything. It's keeping us from running down the man who killed Christine Clay. The whole business is cockeyed. You come clean about your movements on that Wednesday night, and half the irrelevant bits and pieces that are weighing the case down can be shorn off and thrown away. We can't see the outline of it with all the bits that are covering it up and hanging on to it. You want to help us get our man, don't you? Well, prove it!"

"I like you a lot, Inspector. I never thought I'd like a cop so much. But I told you already: I lost my way looking for Chris's cottage, and slept in the car."

"And if I bring witnesses to prove that you were in Dover after midnight?"

"I still slept in the car."

Grant was silent, disappointed. Now he would have to go to Champneis.

Harmer's little brown eyes watched him with something like solicitude.

"You're not getting your sleep these days, Inspector. Heading for a breakdown. Change your mind and have a drink. Wonderful how a drink puts things in their place."

"If you didn't insist on sleeping in the car, I'd have a better chance of sleeping in my bed," Grant said angrily, and took his leave with less than his usual grace.

He wanted to get at Champneis before Jason Harmer had time to tell him that Grant had been making inquiries. The best way to do that was to telephone and ask Champneis to come down to Westover. Offer to send a police car for him at once. And if necessary keep Harmer talking until Champneis would have left town.

But Champneis had already left town. He was in Edinburgh addressing a polite gathering on "The Future of Galeria."

That settled it. Long before anyone could get to him, Harmer would have communicated with him either by telegram or telephone. Grant asked that both means of communication should be tapped, and went back to the lounge to find Jason still sitting over his drink.

"I know you don't like me, Inspector, but honest to God I like you, and honest to God that woman is a holy terror. Do you think you could sort of forget that we are famous-detective and worm-of-a-suspect, and eat together after all?"

Grant smiled, against his will. He had no objections.

Jason smiled, too, a little knowingly. "But if you think by the end of dinner I won't have slept in that car, don't kid yourself." In spite of himself, Grant enjoyed that meal. It was a good game: trying to trap Jason into some kind of admission. The food was good. And Jason was amusing.

Another telephone message came to say that Lord Edward was returning on the first train in the morning, and would be in London by teatime. Grant could expect the warrant for Gotobed by the first post in the morning.

So Grant went to bed at the Marine, puzzled but not suicidal; at least there was a program for the morrow. Jason, too, slept at the Marine, having declared his inability to face Leni anymore that day.

The kitchen of the Marine was in the roof; the latest discovery of architects being that smells go upward. It had set out to be an all-electric kitchen, that being also in the recent creed of architects. But it was not in the creed of Henri, chef of chefs. Henri was Provençal, and to cook by electricity, my God, it was a horror, but a horror! If God had meant us to cook by lightning, He would not have invented fire. So Henri had his stoves and his braziers. And so now, at three in the morning, a soft glow from the banked-up fires filled the enormous white room. Full of high lights, the room was: copper, silver, and enamel. (Not aluminum. Henri fainted at the mention of aluminum.) The door stood half open, and the fire made a quiet ticking now and then.

Presently the door moved. Was pushed a little further ajar. A man stood in the opening, apparently listening. He came in, silent as a shadow, and moved to the cutlery table. A knife gleamed in the dimness as he took it from the drawer. But he made no sound. From the table he moved to the wall where the keys hung on their little board, each on its appointed hook. Without fumbling he took the key he wanted. He hesitated as he was about to leave the room, and came back to the fire as if it fascinated him. His eyes in the light were bright and excited, his face shadowed.

By the hearth lay kindling wood for some morning fire. It had been spread on a newspaper to dry thoroughly. The man noticed it. He pushed the cut wood to one side and lifted the rest of the paper into the small square of firelight. For a moment he read, so still in that silent room that it might have been empty.

And suddenly all was changed. He leaped to his feet, ran to the electric button, and switched on the lights. Ran back to the paper and snatched it from its bed of sticks. He spread it on the table with shaking hands, patting it and smoothing it as if it were a live thing. Then he began to laugh. Softly and consumedly, drumming with his fists on the scrubbed wood. His laughter grew, beyond his control. He ran to the switch again and snapped on all the lights in the kitchen; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. A new thought possessed him. He ran out of the kitchen, along the tiled corridors, silent as a shadow. Down the dim stairs he sped, flight after flight, like a bat. And now he began to laugh again, in sobbing gusts. He shot into the darkness of the great lounge and across it to the green light of the reception desk. There was no one there. The night porter was on his rounds. The man turned a page of the registration book, and ran a wavering finger down it. Then he made off up the stairs again, silent except for his sobbing breath. In the service room on the second floor he took a master key from its hook, and ran to the door of Room 73. The door yielded, he put out his hand to the switch, and leaped on the man in the bed.

Grant struggled out of his dream of contraband, to defend himself against a maniac who was kneeling on his bed shaking him and repeating between sobs: "So you were wrong, and it's all right! You were wrong, and it's all right!"

"Tisdall!" said Grant. "My God, I'm glad to see you. Where have you been?"

"Among the cisterns."

"In the Marine? All the time?"

"Since Thursday night. How long is that? I just walked in at the service door late at night. Rain like stair rods. You could have walked the length of the town in your birthday suit, and there wouldn't have been anyone to see. I knew about the little attic place because I saw it when workmen were here one day. No one's ever there but workmen. I come out at night to get food from the larder. I expect someone's in trouble about that food. Or perhaps they never missed it? Do you think?"

His unnaturally bright eyes scanned Grant anxiously. He had begun to shiver. It did not need much guesswork to place his probable temperature.

Grant pushed him gently down to a sitting position on the bed, took a pair of pajamas from the drawer, and handed them over.

"Here. Get into these and into bed at once. I suppose you were soaking when you arrived at the hotel?"

"Yes. My clothes weighed so much I could hardly walk. But it's dry up in the roof. Warm, too. Too warm in the daytime. You have a n-n-nice taste in n-n-night wear." His teeth were chattering; reaction was flooding him.

Grant helped him with the pajamas and covered him up. He rang for the porter and ordered hot soup and the presence of a doctor. Then he sat down at the telephone and told the good news to the Yard, Tisdall's overbright eyes watching him, quizzically. When he had finished he came over to the bed and said: "I can't tell you how sorry I am about all this. I'd give a lot to undo it."

"Blankets!" said Tisdall. "Sheets! Pillows! Eiderdown! Gosh!" He grinned as far as his chattering teeth and his week's growth of beard would let him. "Say 'Now I Lay Me' for me," he said. And fell abruptly asleep.

In the morning, because the doctor said that "there was a certain congestion which in the subject's weakened condition might at any moment develop into pneumonia," Grant summoned Tisdall's Aunt Muriel, whom the Yard obligingly found, Tisdall having refused to consider the presence of any aunts. Williams was sent to Canterbury to arrest Brother Aloysius, and Grant planned to go back to town after lunch to interview Champneis. He had telephoned the good news of Tisdall's reappearance to Colonel Burgoyne, and the telephone had been answered by Erica.

"Oh, I'm so glad for you!" she said.

"For me?"

"Yes, it must have been awful for you."

And it was only then that Grant realized quite how awful it had been. That continual pushing down of an unnamed fear. What a nice child she was.

The nice child had sent over for the patient in the course of the morning a dozen fresh eggs taken from the Steynes nests that very hour. Grant thought how typical it was of her to send fresh eggs, and not the conventional flowers or fruit.

"I hope she didn't get into trouble for giving me food that time?" Tisdall asked. He always talked as if the occurrences of the last week were many years away; the days in the attic had been a lifetime to him.

"On the contrary. She saved your neck and my reputation. It was she who found your coat. No, I can't tell you about it now. You're supposed not to talk or be talked to."

But he had had to tell all about it. And had left Tisdall saying softly to himself, "Well!" Over and over again: "Well!" in a wondering tone.

The shadow of the Champneis interview had begun to loom over Grant. Supposing he said frankly: "Look here, both you and Jason Harmer went out of your way to lie to me about your movements on a certain night, and now I find that you were together at Dover. What were you doing?" What would the answer be? "My dear sir, I can't answer for Harmer's prevarications, but he was my guest on the *Petronel* and we spent the night fishing in our motorboat." That would be a good alibi.

And still his mind dwelled on the contraband idea. What contraband was of interest to both Champneis and Harmer? And it didn't take a whole night to hand over even a whole car-goload of contraband. Yet neither of them had an alibi for that night. What had they done with the hours from midnight to breakfast?

He had felt, ever since Rimell's revelation at Dover, that if he could remember what Champneis had been talking about just before his fib about the day of his arrival, all would be clear to him.

He decided to go downstairs and have his hair cut before he left the Marine. He was to remember that haircut.

As he put out his hand to push the swing door open, he heard Champneis's voice in his mind, drawling a sentence.

So that was what he had been talking about!

Yes. Yes. Pictures ran together in Grant's mind to make a sequence that made sense. He turned from the saloon door to the telephone and called the Special Branch. He asked them half a dozen questions, and then went to have his hair cut, smiling fatuously. He knew now what he was going to say to Edward Champneis.

It was the busy time of the morning and all the chairs were full.

"Won't be a minute, sir," an anxious supervisor said. "Not a minute if you will wait."

Grant sat down by the wall and reached for a magazine from the pile on a shelf. The pile fell over; a well-thumbed collection, most of them far from new. Because it had a frontispiece of Christine Clay, he picked up a copy of the *Silver Sheet*, an American cinema magazine, and idly turned over the pages. It was the usual bouquet. The "real truth" was told about someone for the fifty-second time, being a completely different real truth from all the other fifty-one real truths. A nitwit blonde explained how she read new meaning into Shakespeare. Another told how she kept her figure. An actress who didn't know one end of a frying pan from the other was photographed in her kitchen making griddle cakes. A he-man star said how grand he thought all the other he-man stars. Grant turned the pages more impatiently. He was on the point of exchanging the magazine for another when his attention was suddenly caught. He read through an article with growing interest. At the last paragraph he got to his feet, still holding the paper and staring at the page.

"Your turn now, sir," the barber said. "This chair, please."

But Grant took no notice.

"We're quite ready for you now, sir. Sorry you've been kept waiting."

Grant looked up at them, only half-conscious of them.

"Can I have this?" he asked, indicating the magazine. "It's six months old. Thank you," and rushed out of the room.

They stared after him, and laughed a little, speculating as to what had taken his fancy.

"Found his affinity," someone suggested.

"Thought they were extinct, affinities," another countered.

"Found something to cure his corns."

"No, gone to consult his best friend."

And they laughed and forgot him.

Grant was in the telephone booth, and the impatient gentleman in the patent leather shoes was beginning to wonder if he was ever coming out of it. He was talking to Owen Hughes, the cinema star. That was why the patent leather gentleman didn't go upstairs to the numerous booths on the ground floor. He was hoping to hear some of the conversation. It was about whether someone had mentioned something in a letter to someone.

"You did!" Grant said. "Thanks! That's all I wanted to know. Keep it under your hat. That I asked, I mean."

Then he had asked for the Thames police, pulling the door tighter and so exasperating the waiting gentleman.

"Has 276 River Walk a motorboat, do you know?"

There was a consultation at the other end.

Yes, 276 had a boat. Yes, very fast. Seagoing? Oh, yes, if necessary. Used it for fowling along the Essex flats, they thought. Used for navigation of the lower river, anyhow? Oh, yes.

Grant asked if they would have a boat ready for him in about an hour and a half, by which time he'd be in town, he hoped. He'd take it as a great favor.

Certainly, they would.

Grant telephoned to Barker—at which point the patent leather gentleman gave it up—and asked that if Williams was back in town within the next ninety minutes he should meet Grant at Westminster Pier. If Williams was not back in time, then Sanger.

Grant took full advantage of the lunchtime lull in traffic, and in unrestricted areas excelled himself in the gentle art of speed with safety. He found Williams waiting for him, a little breathless, since he had that moment arrived from the Yard and sent the disappointed Sanger back. Williams had no intention of being out of anything, if he could help it. And the Superintendent had said that something exciting was due to break.

"Well, was the Reverend Father shocked?" Grant asked.

"Not as shocked as Brother Aloysius. He didn't for a moment imagine we'd got anything on him. By the way he behaved, I should think some other police forces must be anxious to catch up with him."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Where are we going, sir?"

"Chelsea Reach. Beloved of painters and folk dancers."

Williams looked benignly at his superior and noticed how much better he was looking now that the Tisdall boy had turned up.

up.

The police boat drew in to the bank at 276 River Walk where a large grayish motorboat was moored. The police boat edged gingerly nearer until only a foot separated the gunwales.

Grant stepped across. "Come with me, Williams. I want witnesses."

The cabin was locked. Grant glanced up at the house opposite and shook his head. "I'll have to risk it. I'm sure I'm right, anyhow."

While the river police stood by, he forced the lock and went in. It was a tidy, seamanlike cabin; everything was neat and shipshape. Grant began to go through the lockers. In the one under the starboard bunk he found what he was looking for. An oilskin coat. Black. Bought in Cannes. With the button missing from the right cuff.

"You take that, Williams, and come up to the house with me."

The maid said that Miss Keats was in, and left them in a dining room on the ground floor; a very austere and up-to-theminute apartment.

"Looks more like a place to have your appendix out than to put roast beef into you," Williams observed.

But Grant said nothing.

Lydia came in, smiling, her bracelets jangling and her beads clashing.

"I'm sorry I couldn't take you upstairs, my dear Leo person, but I have some clients who mightn't understand that this is just a friendly visit."

"So you knew who I was, at Marta's?"

"Of course. You don't flatter my powers of divination, my dear Mr. Grant. Won't you present your friend?"

"This is Sergeant Williams."

She looked faintly disconcerted, Grant thought, but managed to be gracious to the sergeant. Then she saw what was under Williams's arm.

"What are you doing with my coat?" she asked sharply.

"Then it is your coat? The one in the locker of the boat?"

"Of course it is my coat! How dare you force my cabin! It is always kept locked."

"The lock will be repaired, Miss Keats. Meanwhile I regret to tell you that I must arrest you for the murder of Christine Clay at the Gap at Westover on Thursday morning, the 15th, and warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you."

Her face changed from her habitual expression of satisfaction to the convulsed fury he had seen when Judy Sellers had made light of her powers. "You can't arrest me," she said. "It is not in my stars. Who should know if not I? The stars have no secrets from me. The stars have predicted a glorious destiny for me. It is you, poor mistaken fool, who will go on stumbling and making mistakes. My sign is achievement. Whatever I will I can do. It is set there in the sky that it shall be so. Destiny. 'Some are born great'—that is true and the rest is lies. One is born great or is not great at all. I was born to achieve. To be a leader. To be looked up to by mankind—"

"Miss Keats, I should be grateful if you would prepare to come with us at once. Any clothes you want can be sent after you."

"Clothes? What for?"

"For use in prison."

"I don't understand. You can't put me in prison. It isn't in my stars. They said that what I wanted I could do."

"Everyone can do what they want if they want it enough. But no one with impunity. Will you send for your maid and explain to her? She will fetch your hat if you want it."

"I don't want it. I am not going with you. I am going to a party this afternoon at Marta's. She's got Christine's part, you know. In the new film. That's one good turn I did. It was all written a long time ago what we should do. It falls into place, like the cog things in a musical box, you know. Or perhaps you don't know. Are you musical? And from Marta's I'm going to Owen Hughes. After that we shall see. If you come back in the evening we can talk about it. Do you know Owen? A charming person. He had his appointed place, too. If it hadn't been for Owen it would never have come into my head. No, I don't mean that. Great enterprises belong to great minds. They would happen in any case. But the releasing agent is often very small. Like electric light and the switch. I used that simile in a lecture in Scotland the other week. It went very well. Neat, don't you think? Will you have some sherry? I'm afraid I'm very remiss. It's the consciousness of these people upstairs waiting to be told."

"Told what?"

"About me, of course. No, about themselves. That is what they came for. I'm a little muddled. They want to know what destiny has in store for them. And only I can tell them. Only I, Lydia Keats—"

"May I use your telephone, Miss Keats?"

"Certainly. It is in the cupboard place in the hall. One of the new colored kind. The telephone, not the cupboard. What was I saying?"

Grant said to Williams, "Ask them to send Reynolds around at once."

"Is that the painter? I shall be glad to meet him. He was born to greatness. It is not a matter of application, or mixing pigments, you know. It is having the matter in you. And that the stars arrange. You must let me do a horoscope for you. You are a Leo person. Very attractive people. Kingly born. I have been sorry sometimes that I was not August born. But Aries people are leaders. Talkative, too, I'm afraid." She giggled. "I do talk a lot they tell me. Chatterbox, they called me as a child—"

Half an hour later Reynolds, the police surgeon, gave the screaming, raving thing that had been Lydia Keats a morphine injection so that they might remove her to the station in some sort of decency.

Grant and Williams, standing in the door, watching the disappearing ambulance, found no words.

"Well," Grant said at length, pulling himself together, "I suppose I'd better get along and see Champneis."

"The people that made the laws of this country ought to be shot," Williams said with sudden venom.

Grant looked startled. "Capital punishment, you mean?"

"No! Closed hours."

"Oh, I see. There's a flask in my cupboard. You can help yourself."

"Thank you, sir. Don't take on, miss!" This to the sobbing maid in the background. "Things like that will happen."

"She was a very kind mistress to me," she said. "It hurts me to see her like that."

"Take care of that coat, Williams," Grant said as they went down the path to the car that had been sent for them, glad beyond speech to leave the house behind.

"Tell me, sir, how did you find out it was that woman of all people?"

Grant produced the pages he had torn from the magazine.

"I found that in a magazine in the barbershop at the Marine. You can read it for yourself."

It was an article written by some Midwest sob sister, who had been in New York for a vacation. New York was full of film stars who had either run out on their studies or were on their way back to them, and in New York also was Miss Lydia Keats. And the thing that most impressed the sob sister was not shaking hands with Grace Marvel, but the success of Miss Keats's prophecies. She had made three startling ones. She had prophesied that within three months Lyn Drake would have a serious accident; and everyone knew that Lyn Drake was still on his back. She had said that Millard Robinson would within a month lose a fortune by fire; and everyone knew how the reels of the new million-dollar film had been burned to a cinder. And her third statement prophesied the death by drowning of a woman star of the first magnitude, whose name, of course, she gave, but the sob sister equally of course could not reveal. "If this third prophecy, so circumstantial, so unequivocal, comes true, then Miss Keats is established as the possessor of one of the most uncanny talents in the world. All humanity will be besieging her. But don't go swimming with Miss Keats, little blonde star! The temptation might be too much for her!"

"Well, I'll be damned," said Williams, and was silent until Grant dropped him at the Yard.

"Tell the Superintendent I'll be in as soon as I've seen Lord Edward," Grant said, and was driven on to Regent's Park.

In an atmosphere of marble mantelpieces and sheepskin rugs he waited half an hour before Champneis arrived.

"How are you, Inspector? I hear from Binns that you've been waiting. Sorry to subject you to the furnishings longer than is vitally necessary. I hope you drink tea? But if you don't there are what my uncle called 'cordials.' A much nicer word than 'drinks,' don't you think? Have you news?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry to break in with it when you're just after a journey."

"It can't be worse than the drawing-room lecture of my great-aunt's yesterday. I only went for the old lady's sake, but I found that she thought I should have canceled it. It would have been more 'fitting.' So tell me the bad news."

Grant told him what had happened, and he listened gravely, the unusual defensive flippancy gone.

"Is she insane?" he asked, when Grant had finished.

"Yes. Reynolds thinks so. It may be hysteria, but he thinks it's insanity. Delusions of greatness, you know."

"Poor wretch. But how did she know where my wife was?"

"Owen Hughes told her in a letter from Hollywood. He forgot that it was a secret that she had taken his cottage. He even mentioned the early-morning swimming."

"So simple. I see. . . . Was she very expert with a motorboat, then?"

"She had been practically brought up on one, it seems. Used the river constantly. No one would have thought of questioning her comings and goings. She may have made that night journey down the river more than once before the opportunity she was looking for turned up. Curious, but one never thinks of the river as a high road to anywhere. We had considered the possibility of a motorboat, naturally, but not a motorboat from London. Not that it would have helped us very much if it had. The man's coat she wore was very misleading. Lots of women wear men's oilskins yachting; but I don't think it would have occurred to me."

There was a short silence.

Each man watched in his mind that boat's journey down the misty river, out to the many-lighted estuary, and along the many-lighted coast. One little town after another, from flaring dockyard lights among the flats to twinkling villa lights among the cliffs, must have lit that progress. But later, there must have been darkness; complete darkness and silence, as the summer fog pressed down on the water. What had her thoughts been, in that time of waiting? Alone, with time to reflect. And with no stars to remind her of her greatness. Or was her madness even then so sure that she had no doubts?

And afterwards—each man watched that, too. The surprise. The friendly greeting. Chris's green cap bobbing alongside the gray hull—the cap that had never been found. The woman leaning over to talk to her. And then—

Grant remembered those broken nails on Christine's hands. It had not been so easy, then.

"That finishes the case, sir, but it was really something else that brought me to see you. Another case altogether."

"Yes? Here's tea. You needn't wait, Binns. Sugar, Inspector?"

"I want to know where you took Rimnik."

Champneis paused with the sugar poised. He looked both surprised and amused and—somehow—admiring.

"He is with friends of Harmer's, near Tunbridge Wells."

"May I have the exact address?"

Champneis gave it, and also gave Grant his tea. "Why do you want Rimnik?"

"Because he is in this country without a passport—thanks to you!"

"He was. The office issued him a landing permit this morning. It took a lot of eloquence—Britain the lover of justice, the defender of the persecuted, the home of the righteous homeless: all that stuff—but it worked. Chests still swell in Whitehall, do you know? They were like a collection of pouter pigeons when I finished."

He looked at the Inspector's disapproving face. "I didn't know that that little business had been a worry to you."

"Worry!" Grant burst out. "It nearly ruined everything. You and Harmer both lying about what you had done that night—" He found that he was treading on delicate ground and pulled himself up.

But Champneis had understood. "I really am sorry, Inspector. Are you going to arrest me? Can one be arrested retrospectively, so to speak?"

"I don't think so. I shall have to inquire about it. It would give me great pleasure." Grant had recovered his temper.

"All right. Let's postpone the arrest. But tell me how you found out? I thought we'd been so clever."

"I might never have found out if it hadn't been for a good bit of work by a young officer—Rimell—at Dover."

"I must meet Rimell."

"He found that you and Harmer had met that night and had been worried about the Customs."

"Yes. Rimnik was in a cupboard in my cabin. It was an exciting half hour. But the Customs and Harbor Masters are only human."

This Grant took to mean that they knocked off the Champneis pegs and lacked the nerve to knock on the bulkheads. "It was then I began to feel that if I could remember something you had said just before—you misled me about the time of your arrival in Dover, I would have the key to everything. And I remembered it! You said that Galeria's only hope was Rimnik, and that Rimnik would turn up again when his party was ready. But the big stumbling block was in seeing the connection between you and Harmer. It was so simple and so obvious I couldn't find it. You liked and admired one another immediately when your wife introduced you. I must say he did a beautiful job of throwing dust in my eyes, putting on that resentful—underprivileged classes act. I should have thought more about my recognition of your—"

"My what?"

"Unorthodoxy." Both men smiled. "Once I groped my way through that difficulty, the rest was easy. The Special Branch knew all about Rimnik's disappearance, his being refused a passport, and Britain's refusal to have him here. They even knew that he was supposed to be in England, but had no confirmation of it. So the motorboat came ashore a second time?"

"That night, you mean? Yes. Harmer drove us over to his friend's place. He has guts; he was scared stiff, I think, but he went through with it. I see Tisdall has turned up," he said as Grant rose to go. "That must be an enormous relief to you. Is he ill?"

"No. He has a chill, and he's overwrought, of course. But I hope he's going to be all right."

"In the midday edition I bought at York, I read a harrowing description of his sufferings. Knowing the Press, I believed with confidence that not a word of it was true."

"Not a word. That was just Jammy Hopkins."

"Who is Jammy Hopkins?"

"Who is—" Words failed the Inspector. He looked enviously at Champneis. "Now I know," he said, "why men go out into the waste places of the earth!"

Herbert Gotobed left England about a month later on his way to explain to the inquisitive police of Nashville, Tennessee, what he had done with the two thousand dollars old Mrs. Kinsley had given him to build a church with.

And on the day that he sailed—although neither party knew of the other's activities—Erica had a dinner party at Steynes "to take the taste of the last one away," as she said bluntly to Grant when she invited him. The only addition to the original personnel was Robin Tisdall, and Grant found himself ridiculously relieved to find that her small nose was still as casually powdered, and her frock still as childish as on the first occasion. He was afraid that contact with anyone as good-looking and illused as Robin Tisdall would have bred a self-awareness that would be the end of her girlhood. But it seemed as if nothing could make Erica self-conscious. She treated Tisdall with the same grave matter-of-factness she had used when she had told him that his shirt collar was too tight. Grant saw Sir George's eyes going from one to the other in glad amusement. Their glances met, and moved by a common impulse the two men raised their glasses in a small gesture of mutual congratulation.

"Are you drinking a toast?" Erica asked. "I'll give you one. To Robin's success in California!"

They drank it with a will.

"If you don't like the ranch," Erica said, "wait till I am twenty-one and I'll buy it from you."

"Would you like that sort of life?" His tone was eager.

"Of course I should." She turned to Grant, beginning to say something.

"You'll have to come out and see it long before you're twenty-one," Robin persisted.

"Yes, that would be nice." She was sincere but inattentive. "Mr. Grant" (for some reason she never called him Inspector) "if I get those tickets from Mr. Mills myself will you come with me to the Circus at Christmas?"

She was very faintly pink, as if she had asked a forward thing. A phenomenon in Erica, who was forward by nature and never knew it.

"Of course I will," Grant said, "with the greatest pleasure."

"All right," she said. "That's a promise." She lifted her glass. "To Olympia, at Christmas!"

"To Olympia at Christmas!" Grant said.

"FIRST RATE MYSTERY, ABLY PLOTTED AND BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN." -Los Angeles Times

JOSEPHINE TEY



WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT BARNARD

It was four o'clock of a spring evening; and Robert Blair was thinking of going home.

The office would not shut until five, of course. But when you are the only Blair, of Blair, Hayward, and Bennet, you go home when you think you will. And when your business is mostly wills, conveyancing, and investments your services are in small demand in the late afternoon. And when you live in Milford, where the last post goes out at 3:45, the day loses whatever momentum it ever had long before four o'clock.

It was not even likely that his telephone would ring. His golfing cronies would by now be somewhere between the fourteenth and the sixteenth hole. No one would ask him to dinner, because in Milford invitations to dinner are still written by hand and sent through the post. And Aunt Lin would not ring up and ask him to call for the fish on his way home, because this was her biweekly afternoon at the cinema, and she would at the moment be only twenty minutes gone with feature, so to speak.

So he sat there, in the lazy atmosphere of a spring evening in a little market town, staring at the last patch of sunlight on his desk (the mahogany desk with the brass inlay that his grandfather had scandalised the family by bringing home from Paris) and thought about going home. In the patch of sunlight was his tea-tray; and it was typical of Blair, Hayward, and Bennet that tea was no affair of a japanned tin tray and a kitchen cup. At 3:50 exactly on every working day Miss Tuff bore into his office a lacquer tray covered with a fair white cloth and bearing a cup of tea in blue-patterned china, and, on a plate to match, two biscuits; petit-beurre Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, digestive Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

Looking at it now, idly, he thought how much it represented the continuity of Blair, Hayward, and Bennet. The china he could remember as long as he could remember anything. The tray had been used when he was very small by the cook at home to take the bread in from the baker, and had been rescued by his young mother and brought to the office to bear the blue-patterned cups. The cloth had come years later with the advent of Miss Tuff. Miss Tuff was a war-time product; the first woman who had ever sat at a desk in a respectable solicitor's in Milford. A whole revolution Miss Tuff was in her single gawky thin earnest person. But the firm had survived the revolution with hardly a jolt, and now, nearly a quarter of a century later, it was inconceivable that thin grey dignified Miss Tuff had ever been a sensation. Indeed her only disturbance of the immemorial routine was the introduction of the tray-cloth. In Miss Tuff's home no meal was ever put straight on to a tray; if it comes to that, no cakes were ever put straight on to a plate; a tray cloth or a doyley must intervene. So Miss Tuff had looked askance at the bare tray. She had, moreover, considered the lacquered pattern distracting, unappetising, and "queer." So one day she had brought a cloth from home; decent, plain, and white, as befitted something that was to be eaten off of. And Robert's father, who had liked the lacquer tray, looked at the clean white cloth and was touched by young Miss Tuff's identification of herself with the firm's interests, and the cloth had stayed, and was now as much a part of the firm's life as the deed-boxes, and the brass plate, and Mr. Heseltine's annual cold.

It was when his eyes rested on the blue plate where the biscuits had been that Robert experienced that odd sensation in his chest again. The sensation had nothing to do with the two digestive biscuits; at least, not physically. It had to do with the inevitability of the biscuit routine; the placid certainty that it would be digestive on a Thursday and petit-beurre on a Monday. Until the last year or so, he had found no fault with certainty or placidity. He had never wanted any other life but this: this quiet friendly life in the place where he had grown up. He still did not want any other. But once or twice lately an odd, alien thought had crossed his mind; irrelevant and unbidden. As nearly as it could be put into words it was: "This is all you are ever going to have." And with the thought would come that moment's constriction in his chest. Almost a panic reaction; like the heart-squeezing that remembering a dentist appointment would cause in his ten-year-old breast.

This annoyed and puzzled Robert; who considered himself a happy and fortunate person, and adult at that. Why should this foreign thought thrust itself on him and cause that dismayed tightening under his ribs? What had his life lacked that a man might be supposed to miss?

A wife?

But he could have married if he had wanted to. At least he supposed he could; there were a great many unattached females in the district, and they showed no signs of disliking him.

A devoted mother?

But what greater devotion could a mother have given him than Aunt Lin provided; dear doting Aunt Lin.

Riches?

What had he ever wanted that he could not buy? And if that wasn't riches he didn't know what was.

An exciting life?

But he had never wanted excitement. No greater excitement, that is, than was provided by a day's hunting or being all-square at the sixteenth.

Then what?

Why the "This is all you are ever going to have" thought?

Perhaps, he thought, sitting staring at the blue plate where the biscuits had been, it was just that Childhood's attitude of something-wonderful-tomorrow persisted subconsciously in a man as long as it was capable of realisation, and it was only after forty, when it became unlikely of fulfillment, that it obtruded itself into conscious thought; a lost piece of childhood crying for

attention.

Certainly he, Robert Blair, hoped very heartily that his life would go on being what it was until he died. He had known since his schooldays that he would go into the firm and one day succeed his father; and he had looked with good-natured pity on boys who had no niche in life ready-made for them; who had no Milford, full of friends and memories, waiting for them; no part in English continuity as was provided by Blair, Hayward, and Bennet.

There was no Hayward in the firm nowadays; there had not been one since 1843; but a young sprig of the Bennets was occupying the back room at this moment. Occupying was the operative word, since it was very unlikely that he was doing any work; his chief interest in life being to write poems of an originality so pristine that only Nevil himself could understand them. Robert deplored the poems but condoned the idleness, since he could not forget that when he had occupied that same room he had spent his time practising mashie shots into the leather arm-chair.

The sunlight slipped off the edge of the tray and Robert decided it was time to go. If he went now he could walk home down the High Street before the sunlight was off the eastside pavement; and walking down Milford High Street was still one of the things that gave him conscious pleasure. Not that Milford was a show-place. It could be duplicated a hundred times anywhere south of Trent. But in its unselfconscious fashion it typified the goodness of life in England for the last three hundred years. From the old dwelling-house flush with the pavement that housed Blair, Hayward, and Bennet and had been built in the last years of Charles the Second's reign, the High Street flowed south in a gentle slope—Georgian brick, Elizabethan timber-and-plaster, Victorian stone, Regency stucco—to the Edwardian villas behind their elm trees at the other end. Here and there, among the rose and white and brown, appeared a front of black glass, brazening it out like an over-dressed parvenu at a party; but the good manners of the other buildings discounted them. Even the multiple businesses had dealt leniently with Milford. True, the scarlet and gold of an American bazaar flaunted its bright promise down at the south end, and daily offended Miss Truelove who ran the Elizabethan relic opposite as a teashop with the aid of her sister's baking and Ann Boleyn's reputation. But the Westminister Bank, with a humility rare since the days of usury, had adapted the Weavers Hall to their needs without so much as a hint of marble; and Soles, the wholesale chemists, had taken the old Wisdom residence and kept its tall surprised-looking front intact.

It was a fine, gay, busy little street, punctuated with pollarded lime trees growing out of the pavement; and Robert Blair loved it.

He had gathered his feet under him preparatory to getting up, when his telephone rang. In other places in the world, one understands, telephones are made to ring in outer offices, where a minion answers the thing and asks your business and says that if you will be good enough to wait just a moment she will "put you thrrrough" and you are then connected with the person you want to speak to. But not in Milford. Nothing like that would be tolerated in Milford. In Milford if you call John Smith on the telephone you expect John Smith to answer in person. So when the telephone rang on that spring evening in Blair, Hayward, and Bennet's it rang on Robert's brass-and-mahogany desk.

Always, afterwards, Robert was to wonder what would have happened if that telephone call had been one minute later. In one minute, sixty worthless seconds, he would have taken his coat from the peg in the hall, popped his head into the opposite room to tell Mr. Heseltine that he was departing for the day, stepped out into the pale sunlight and been away down the street. Mr. Heseltine would have answered his telephone when it rang and told the woman that he had gone. And she would have hung up and tried someone else. And all that followed would have had only academic interest for him.

But the telephone rang in time: and Robert put out his hand and picked up the receiver.

"Is that Mr. Blair?" a woman's voice asked; a contralto voice that would normally be a confident one, he felt, but now sounded breathless or hurried. "Oh, I am so glad to have caught you. I was afraid you would have gone for the day. Mr. Blair, you don't know me. My name is Sharpe, Marion Sharpe. I live with my mother at The Franchise. The house out on the Larborough road, you know."

"Yes, I know it," Blair said. He knew Marion Sharpe by sight, as he knew everyone in Milford and the district. A tall, lean, dark woman of forty or so; much given to bright silk kerchiefs which accentuated her gipsy swarthiness. She drove a battered old car, from which she shopped in the mornings while her white-haired old mother sat in the back, upright and delicate and incongruous and somehow silently protesting. In profile old Mrs. Sharpe looked like Whistler's mother; when she turned full-face and you got the impact of her bright, pale, cold, seagull's eye, she looked like a sibyl. An uncomfortable old person.

"You don't know me," the voice went on, "but I have seen you in Milford, and you look a kind person, and I need a lawyer. I mean, I need one now, this minute. The only lawyer we ever have business with is in London—a London firm, I mean—and they are not actually ours. We just inherited them with a legacy. But now I am in trouble and I need legal backing, and I remembered you and thought that you would—"

"If it is your car—" Robert began. "In trouble" in Milford meant one of two things; an affiliation order, or an offence against the traffic laws. Since the case involved Marion Sharpe, it would be the latter; but it made no difference because in neither case was Blair, Hayward, and Bennet likely to be interested. He would pass her on to Carley, the bright lad at the other end of the street, who revelled in court cases and was popularly credited with the capacity to bail the Devil out of hell. ("Bail him out!" someone said, one night at the Rose and Crown. "He'd do more than that. He'd get all our signatures to a guinea testimonial to the Old Sinner.")

"If it is your car—'

"Car?" she said, vaguely; as if in her present world it was difficult to remember what a car was. "Oh, I see. No. Oh, no, it isn't anything like that. It is something much more serious. It's Scotland Yard."

"Scotland Yard!"

To that douce country lawyer and gentleman, Robert Blair, Scotland Yard was as exotic as Xanadu, Hollywood, or parachuting. As a good citizen he was on comfortable terms with the local police, and there his connection with crime ended. The nearest he had ever come to Scotland Yard was to play golf with the local Inspector; a good chap who played a very steady

game and occasionally, when it came to the nineteenth, expanded into mild indiscretions about his job.

"I haven't murdered anyone, if that is what you are thinking," the voice said hastily.

"The point is: are you *supposed* to have murdered anyone?" Whatever she was supposed to have done this was clearly a case for Carley. He must edge her off on to Carley.

"No; it isn't murder at all. I'm supposed to have kidnapped someone. Or abducted them, or something. I can't explain over the telephone. And anyhow I need someone now, at once, and—"

"But, you know, I don't think it is me you need at all," Robert said. "I know practically nothing about criminal law. My firm is not equipped to deal with a case of that sort. The man you need—"

"I don't want a criminal lawyer. I want a friend. Someone who will stand by me and see that I am not put-upon. I mean, tell me what I need not answer if I don't want to, and that sort of thing. You don't need a training in crime for that, do you?"

"No, but you would be much better served by a firm who were used to police cases. A firm that—"

"What you are trying to tell me is that this is not 'your cup of tea'; that's it, isn't it?"

"No, of course not," Robert said hastily. "I quite honestly feel that you would be wiser-

"You know what I feel like?" she broke in. "I feel like someone drowning in a river because she can't drag herself up the bank, and instead of giving me a hand you point out that the other bank is much better to crawl out on."

There was a moment's silence.

"But on the contrary," Robert said, "I can provide you with an expert puller-out-of-rivers; a great improvement on my amateur self, I assure you. Benjamin Carley knows more about defending accused persons than anyone between here and—"

"What! That awful little man with the striped suits!" Her deep voice ran up and cracked, and there was another momentary silence. "I am sorry," she said presently in her normal voice. "That was silly. But you see, when I rang you up just now it wasn't because I thought you would be clever about things" ("Warn't it, indeed," thought Robert) "but because I was in trouble and wanted the advice of someone of my own sort. And you looked my sort. Mr. Blair, do please come. I need you now. There are people from Scotland Yard here in the house. And if you feel that it isn't something you want to be mixed up in you could always pass it on to someone else afterwards; couldn't you? But there may be nothing after all to be mixed up in. If you would just come out here and 'watch my interests' or whatever you call it, for an hour, it may all pass over. I'm sure there is a mistake somewhere. Couldn't you please do that for me?"

On the whole Robert Blair thought that he could. He was too good-natured to refuse any reasonable appeal—and she had given him a loophole if things grew difficult. And he did not, after all, now he came to think of it, want to throw her to Ben Carley. In spite of her *bêtise* about striped suits he saw her point of view. If you had done something you wanted to get away with, Carley was no doubt God's gift to you; but if you were bewildered and in trouble and innocent, perhaps Carley's brash personality was not likely to be a very present help.

All the same, he wished as he laid down the receiver that the front he presented to the world was a more forbidding one—Calvin or Caliban, he did not care, so long as strange females were discouraged from flinging themselves on his protection when they were in trouble.

What possible kind of trouble could "kidnapping" be, he wondered as he walked round to the garage in Sin Lane for his car? Was there such an offence in English law? And whom could she possibly be interested in kidnapping? A child? Some child with "expectations"? In spite of the large house out on the Larborough road they gave the impression of having very little money. Or some child that they considered "ill-used" by its natural guardians? That was possible. The old woman had a fanatic's face, if ever he saw one; and Marion Sharpe herself looked as if the stake would be her natural prop if stakes were not out of fashion. Yes, it was probably some ill-judged piece of philanthropy. Detention "with intent to deprive parent, guardian, etc., of its possession." He wished he remembered more of his Harris and Wilshere. He could not remember off-hand whether that was a felony, with penal servitude in the offing, or a mere misdemeanour. "Abduction and Detention" had not sullied the Blair, Hayward, and Bennet files since December 1798, when the squire of Lessows, much flown with seasonable claret, had taken the young Miss Gretton across his saddle-bow from a ball at the Gretton home and ridden away with her through the floods; and there was no doubt at all, of course, as to the squire's motive on that occasion.

Ah, well; they would no doubt be open to reason now that they had been startled by the irruption of Scotland Yard into their plans. He was a little startled by Scotland Yard himself. Was the child so important that it was a matter for Headquarters?

Round in Sin Lane he ran into the usual war but extricated himself. (Etymologists, in case you are interested, say that the "Sin" is merely a corruption of "sand," but the inhabitants of Milford of course know better; before those council houses were built on the low meadows behind the town the lane led direct to the lovers' walk in High Wood.) Across the narrow lane, face to face in perpetual enmity, stood the local livery stable and the town's newest garage. The garage frightened the horses (so said the livery stable), and the livery stable blocked up the lane continually with delivery loads of straw and fodder and what not (so said the garage). Moreover the garage was run by Bill Brough, ex-R.E.M.E., and Stanley Peters, ex-Royal Corps of Signals; and old Matt Ellis, ex-King's Dragoon Guards, looked on them as representatives of a generation which had destroyed the cavalry and an offence to civilisation.

In winter, when he hunted, Robert heard the cavalry side of the story; for the rest of the year he listened to the Royal Corps of Signals while his car was being wiped, oiled, filled, or fetched. Today the Signals wanted to know the difference between libel and slander, and what exactly constituted defamation of character. Was it defamation of character to say that a man was "a tinkerer with tin cans who wouldn't know a nut from an acorn"?

"Don't know, Stan. Have to think it over," Robert said hastily, pressing the starter. He waited while three tired hacks brought back two fat children and a groom from their afternoon ride ("See what I mean?" said Stanley in the background) and then swung the car into the High Street.

Down at the south end of the High Street the shops faded gradually into dwelling houses with doorsteps on the pavement, then to houses set back a pace and with porticos to their doors, and then to villas with trees in their gardens, and then, quite

suddenly, to fields and open country.

It was farming country; a land of endless hedged fields and few houses. A rich country, but lonely; one could travel mile after mile without meeting another human being. Quiet and confident and unchanged since the Wars of the Roses, hedged field succeeded hedged field, and skyline faded into skyline, without any break in the pattern. Only the telegraph posts betrayed the century.

Away beyond the horizon was Larborough. Larborough was bicycles, small arms, tin-tacks, Cowan's Cranberry Sauce, and a million human souls living cheek by jowl in dirty red brick; and periodically it broke bounds in an atavistic longing for grass and earth. But there was nothing in the Milford country to attract a race who demanded with their grass and earth both views and teahouses; when Larborough went on holiday it went as one man west to the hills and the sea, and the great stretch of country north and east of it stayed lonely and quiet and unlittered as it had been in the days of the Sun in Splendour. It was "dull"; and by that damnation was saved.

Two miles out on the Larborough road stood the house known as The Franchise; set down by the roadside with the inconsequence of a telephone kiosk. In the last days of the Regency someone had bought the field known as The Franchise, built in the middle of it a flat white house, and then surrounded the whole with a high solid wall of brick with a large double gate, of wall height, in the middle of the road frontage. It had no relation with anything in the countryside. No farm buildings in the background; no side-gates, even, into the surrounding fields. Stables were built in accordance with the period at the back of the house, but they were inside the wall. The place was as irrelevant, as isolated, as a child's toy dropped by the wayside. It had been occupied as long as Robert could remember by an old man; presumably the same old man, but since The Franchise people had always shopped at Ham Green, the village on the Larborough side of them, they had never been seen in Milford. And then Marion Sharpe and her mother had begun to be part of the morning shopping scene in Milford, and it was understood that they had inherited The Franchise when the old man died.

How long had they been there, Robert wondered. Three years? Four years?

That they had not entered Milford socially was nothing to reckon by. Old Mrs. Warren, who had bought the last of the elm-shaded villas at the end of the High Street a small matter of twenty-five years ago in the hope that midland air would be better for her rheumatism than the sea, was still referred to as "that lady from Weymouth." (It was Swanage, incidentally.)

The Sharpes, moreover, might not have sought social contacts. They had an odd air of being self-sufficient. He had seen the daughter once or twice on the golf-course, playing (presumably as a guest) with Dr. Borthwick. She drove a long ball like a man, and used her thin brown wrists like a professional. And that was all Robert knew about her.

As he brought the car to a stop in front of the tall iron gates, he found that two other cars were already there. It needed only one glance at the nearer—so inconspicuous, so well-groomed, so discreet—to identify it. In what other country in this world, he wondered as he got out of his own car, does the police force take pains to be well-mannered and quiet?

His eye lighted on the further car and he saw that it was Hallam's; the local Inspector who played such a steady game on the golf course.

There were three people in the police car: the driver, and, in the back, a middle-aged woman and what seemed to be either a child or a young girl. The driver regarded him with that mild, absent-minded, all-observing police eye, and then withdrew his gaze, but the faces in the back he could not see.

The tall iron gates were shut—Robert could not remember ever seeing them open—and Robert pushed open one heavy half with frank curiosity. The iron lace of the original gates had been lined, in some Victorian desire for privacy, by flat sheets of cast iron; and the wall was too high for anything inside to be visible; so that, except for a distant view of its roof and chimneys, he had never seen The Franchise.

His first feeling was disappointment. It was not the fallen-on-evil-times look of the house—although that was evident; it was the sheer ugliness of it. Either it had been built too late to share in the grace of a graceful period, or the builder had lacked an architect's eye. He had used the idiom of the time, but it had apparently not been native to him. Everything was just a little wrong: the windows the wrong size by half a foot, wrongly placed by not much more; the doorway the wrong width, and the flight of steps the wrong height. The total result was that instead of the bland contentment of its period the house had a hard stare. An antagonistic, questioning stare. As he walked across the courtyard to the unwelcoming door Robert knew what it reminded him of: a dog that has been suddenly wakened from sleep by the advent of a stranger, propped on his forelegs, uncertain for a moment whether to attack or merely bark. It had the same what-are-you-doing-here? expression.

Before he could ring the bell the door was opened; not by a maid but by Marion Sharpe.

"I saw you coming," she said, putting out her hand. "I didn't want you to ring because my mother lies down in the afternoons, and I am hoping that we can get this business over before she wakes up. Then she need never know anything about it. I am more grateful than I can say to you for coming."

Robert murmured something, and noticed that her eyes, which he had expected to be a bright gipsy brown, were actually a grey hazel. She drew him into the hall, and he noticed as he put his hat down on a chest that the rug on the floor was threadbare.

"The Law is in here," she said, pushing open a door and ushering him into a drawing-room. Robert would have liked to talk to her alone for a moment, to orientate himself; but it was too late now to suggest that. This was evidently the way she wanted it.

Sitting on the edge of a bead-work chair was Hallam, looking sheepish. And by the window, entirely at his ease in a very nice piece of Hepplewhite, was Scotland Yard in the person of a youngish spare man in a well-tailored suit.

As they got up, Hallam and Robert nodded to each other.

"You know Inspector Hallam, then?" Marion Sharpe said. "And this is Detective-Inspector Grant from Headquarters."

Robert noticed the "Headquarters," and wondered. Had she already at some time had dealings with the police, or was it that she just didn't like the slightly sensational sound of "the Yard"?

Grant shook hands, and said:

"I'm glad you've come, Mr. Blair. Not only for Miss Sharpe's sake but for my own."

"Yours?"

"I couldn't very well proceed until Miss Sharpe had some kind of support; friendly support if not legal, but if legal so much the better."

"I see. And what are you charging her with?"

"We are not charging her with anything—" Grant began, but Marion interrupted him.

"I am supposed to have kidnapped and beaten up someone."

"Beaten up?" Robert said, staggered.

"Yes," she said, with a kind of relish in enormity. "Beaten her black and blue."

"Her?"

"A girl. She is outside the gate in a car now."

"I think we had better begin at the beginning," Robert said, clutching after the normal.

"Perhaps I had better do the explaining," Grant said, mildly.

"Yes," said Miss Sharpe, "do. After all it is your story."

Robert wondered if Grant were aware of the mockery. He wondered a little, too, at the coolness that could afford mockery with Scotland Yard sitting in one of her best chairs. She had not sounded cool over the telephone; she had sounded driven, half-desperate. Perhaps it was the presence of an ally that had heartened her; or perhaps she had just got her second wind.

"Just before Easter," Grant began, in succinct police-fashion, "a girl called Elisabeth Kane, who lived with her guardians near Aylesbury, went to spend a short holiday with a married aunt in Mainshill, the suburb of Larborough. She went by coach, because the London-Larborough coaches pass through Aylesbury, and also pass through Mainshill before reaching Larborough; so that she could get off the coach in Mainshill and be within a three-minute walk of her aunt's house, instead of having to go into Larborough and come all the way out again as she would have to if she travelled by train. At the end of a week her guardians—a Mr. and Mrs. Wynn—had a postcard from her saying that she was enjoying herself very much and was staying on. They took this to mean staying on for the duration of her school holiday, which would mean another three weeks. When she didn't turn up on the day before she was supposed to go back to school, they took it for granted that she was merely playing truant and wrote to her aunt to send her back. The aunt, instead of going to the nearest call-box or telegraph office, broke it to the Wynns in a letter, that her niece had left on her way back to Aylesbury a fortnight previously. The exchange of letters had taken the best part of another week, so that by the time the guardians went to the police about it the girl had been missing for four weeks. The police took all the usual measures but before they could really get going the girl turned up. She walked into her home near Aylesbury late one night wearing only a dress and shoes, and in a state of complete exhaustion."

"How old is the girl?" Robert asked.

"Fifteen. Nearly sixteen." He waited a moment to see if Robert had further questions, and then went on. (As one counsel to another, thought Robert appreciatively; a manner to match the car that stood so unobtrusively at the gate.) "She said she had been 'kidnapped' in a car, but that was all the information anyone got from her for two days. She lapsed into a semi-conscious condition. When she recovered, about forty-eight hours later, they began to get her story from her."

"They?

"The Wynns. The police wanted it, of course, but she grew hysterical at any mention of police, so they had to acquire it second-hand. She said that while she was waiting for her return coach at the cross-roads in Mainshill, a car pulled up at the kerb with two women in it. The younger woman, who was driving, asked her if she was waiting for a bus and if they could give her a lift."

"Was the girl alone?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't anyone go to see her off?"

"Her uncle was working, and her aunt had gone to be godmother at a christening." Again he paused to let Robert put further questions if he was so minded. "The girl said that she was waiting for the London coach, and they told her that it had already gone by. Since she had arrived at the cross-roads with very little time to spare, and her watch was not a particularly accurate one, she believed this. Indeed, she had begun to be afraid, even before the car stopped, that she had missed the coach. She was distressed about it because it was by then four o'clock, beginning to rain, and growing dark. They were very sympathetic, and suggested that they should give her a lift to a place whose name she did not catch, where she could get a different coach to London in half an hour's time. She accepted this gratefully and got in beside the elder woman in the back of the car."

A picture swam into Robert's mind of old Mrs. Sharpe, upright and intimidating, in her usual place in the back of the car. He glanced at Marion Sharpe, but her face was calm. This was a story she had heard already.

"The rain blurred the windows, and she talked to the older woman about herself as they went along, so that she paid little attention to where they were going. When she at last took notice of her surroundings the evening outside the windows had become quite dark and it seemed to her that they had been travelling for a long time. She said something about its being extraordinarily kind of them to take her so far out of their way, and the younger woman, speaking for the first time, said that as it happened it was not out of their way, and that, on the contrary, she would have time to come in and have a cup of something hot with them before they took her on to her new cross-roads. She was doubtful about this, but the younger woman said it would be of no advantage to wait for twenty minutes in the rain when she could be warm and dry and fed in those same twenty minutes; and she agreed that this seemed sensible. Eventually the younger woman got out, opened what appeared to the girl to be drive gates, and the car was driven up to a house which it was too dark to see. She was taken into a large kitchen—"

"A kitchen?" Robert repeated.

"Yes, a kitchen. The older woman put some cold coffee on the stove to heat while the younger one cut sandwiches.

'Sandwiches without tops,' the girl called them."

"Smorgasbord."

"Yes. While they are and drank, the younger woman told her that they had no maid at the moment and asked her if she would like to be a maid for them for a little. She said that she wouldn't. They tried persuasion, but she stuck to it that that was not at all the kind of job she would take. Their faces began to grow blurred as she talked, and when they suggested that she might at least come upstairs and see what a nice bedroom she would have if she stayed she was too fuddled in her mind to do anything but follow their suggestion. She remembered going up a first flight with a carpet, and a second flight with what she calls 'something hard' underfoot, and that was all she remembered until she woke in daylight on a truckle bed in a bare little attic. She was wearing only her slip, and there was no sign of the rest of her clothes. The door was locked, and the small round window would not open. In any case—"

"Round window!" said Robert, uncomfortably.

But it was Marion who answered him. "Yes," she said, meaningly. "A round window up in the roof."

Since his last thought as he came to her front door a few minutes ago had been how badly placed was the little round window in the roof, there seemed to Robert to be no adequate comment. Grant made his usual pause for courtesy's sake, and went on.

"Presently the younger woman arrived with a bowl of porridge. The girl refused it and demanded her clothes and her release. The woman said that she would eat it when she was hungry enough and went away, leaving the porridge behind. She was alone till evening, when the same woman brought her tea on a tray with fresh cakes and tried to talk her into giving the maid's job a trial. The girl again refused, and for days, according to her story, this alternate coaxing and bullying went on, sometimes by one of the women and sometimes by the other. Then she decided that if she could break the small round window she might be able to crawl out of it on to the roof, which was protected by a parapet, and call the attention of some passerby, or some visiting tradesman, to her plight. Unfortunately, her only implement was a chair, and she had managed only to crack the glass before the younger woman interrupted her, in a great passion. She snatched the chair from the girl and belaboured her with it until she was breathless. She went away, taking the chair with her, and the girl thought that was the end of it. But in a few moments the woman came back with what the girl thinks was a dog whip and beat her until she fainted. Next day the older woman appeared with an armful of bed linen and said that if she would not work she would at least sew. No sewing, no food. She was too stiff to sew and so had no food. The following day she was threatened with another beating if she did not sew. So she mended some of the linen and was given stew for supper. This arrangement lasted for some time, but if her sewing was bad or insufficient, she was either beaten or deprived of food. Then one evening the older woman brought the usual bowl of stew and went away leaving the door unlocked. The girl waited, thinking it was a trap that would end in another beating; but in the end she ventured on to the landing. There was no sound, and she ran down a flight of uncarpeted stairs. Then down a second flight to the first landing. Now she could hear the two women talking in the kitchen. She crept down the last flight and dashed for the door. It was unlocked and she ran out just as she was into the night."

"In her slip?" Robert asked.

"I forgot to say that the slip had been exchanged for her dress. There was no heating in the attic, and in nothing but a slip she would probably have died."

"If she ever was in an attic," Robert said.

"If, as you say, she ever was in an attic," the Inspector agreed smoothly. And without his customary pause of courtesy went on: "She does not remember much after that. She walked a great distance in the dark, she says. It seemed a highroad but there was no traffic and she met no one. Then, on a main road, some time later, a lorry driver saw her in his headlight and stopped to give her a lift. She was so tired that she fell straight asleep. She woke as she was being set on her feet at the roadside. The lorry driver was laughing at her and saying that she was like a sawdust doll that had lost its stuffing. It seemed to be still night time. The lorry driver said this was where she said she wanted to be put off, and drove away. After a little she recognised the corner. It was less than two miles from her home. She heard a clock strike eleven. And shortly before midnight she arrived home."

There was a short silence.

"And this is the girl who is sitting in a car outside the gate of The Franchise at this moment?" said Robert.

"Yes."

"I take it that you have reasons for bringing her here."

"Yes. When the girl had recovered sufficiently she was induced to tell her story to the police. It was taken down in shorthand as she told it, and she read the typed version and signed it. In that statement there were two things that helped the police a lot. These are the relevant extracts:

"'When we had been going for some time we passed a bus that had MILFORD in a lighted sign on it. No, I don't know where Milford is. No, I have never been there.'

"That is one. The other is:

'From the window of the attic I could see a high brick wall with a big iron gate in the middle of it. There was a road on the further side of the wall, because I could see the telegraph posts. No, I couldn't see the traffic on it because the wall was too high. Just the tops of lorry loads sometimes. You couldn't see through the gate because it had sheets of iron on the inside. Inside the gate the carriage way went straight for a little and then divided in two into a circle up to the door. No, it wasn't a garden, just grass. Yes, lawn, I suppose. No, I don't remember any shrubs; just the grass and the paths.'"

Grant shut the little notebook he had been quoting from.

"As far as we know—and the search has been thorough—there is no other house between Larborough and Milford which fulfils the girl's description except The Franchise. The Franchise, moreover, fulfils it in every particular. When the girl saw the wall and the gate today she was sure that this was the place; but she has not so far seen inside the gate, of course. I had first to explain matters to Miss Sharpe, and find out if she was willing to be confronted with the girl. She very rightly suggested that some legal witness should be present."

"Do you wonder that I wanted help in a hurry?" Marion Sharpe said, turning to Robert. "Can you imagine a more nightmare piece of nonsense?"

"The girl's story is certainly the oddest mixture of the factual and the absurd. I know that domestic help is scarce," Robert said, "but would anyone hope to enlist a servant by forcibly detaining her, to say nothing of beating and starving her."

"No normal person, of course," Grant agreed, keeping his eye steadily fixed on Robert's so that it had no tendency to slide over to Marion Sharpe. "But believe me in my first twelve months in the force I had come across a dozen things much more incredible. There is no end to the extravagances of human conduct."

"I agree; but the extravagance is just as likely to be in the girl's conduct. After all, the extravagance begins with her. She is the one who has been missing for—" He paused in question.

"A month," Grant supplied.

"For a month; while there is no suggestion that the household at The Franchise has varied at all from its routine. Would it not be possible for Miss Sharpe to provide an alibi for the day in question?"

"No," Marion Sharpe said. "The day, according to the Inspector, is the 28th of March. That is a long time ago, and our days here vary very little, if at all. It would be quite impossible for us to remember what we were doing on March the 28th—and most unlikely that anyone would remember for us."

"Your maid?" Robert suggested. "Servants have ways of marking their domestic life that is often surprising."

"We have no maid," she said. "We find it difficult to keep one: The Franchise is so isolated."

The moment threatened to become awkward and Robert hastened to break it.

"This girl—I don't know her name, by the way."

"Elisabeth Kane; known as Betty Kane."

"Oh, yes; you did tell me. I'm sorry. This girl—may we know something about her? I take it that the police have investigated her before accepting so much of her story. Why guardians and not her parents, for instance?"

"She is a war orphan. She was evacuated to the Aylesbury district as a small child. She was an only child, and was billeted with the Wynns, who had a boy four years older. About twelve months later both parents were killed, in the same 'incident,' and the Wynns, who had always wanted a daughter and were very fond of the child, were glad to keep her. She looks on them as her parents, since she can hardly remember the real ones."

"I see. And her record?"

"Excellent. A very quiet girl, by every account. Good at her school work but not brilliant. Has never been in any kind of trouble, in school or out of it. 'Transparently truthful' was the phrase her former mistress used about her."

"When she eventually turned up at her home, after her absence, was there any evidence of the beatings she said she had been

given?"

"Oh, yes. Very definitely. The Wynns' own doctor saw her early next morning, and his statement is that she had been very extensively knocked about. Indeed, some of the bruises were still visible much later when she made her statement to us."

"No history of epilepsy?"

"No; we considered that very early in the inquiry. I should like to say that the Wynns are very sensible people. They have been greatly distressed, but they have not tried to dramatise the affair, or allowed the girl to be an object of interest or pity. They have taken the affair admirably."

"And all that remains is for me to take my end of it with the same admirable detachment," Marion Sharpe said.

"You see my position, Miss Sharpe. The girl not only describes the house in which she says she was detained; she describes the two inhabitants—and describes them very accurately. 'A thin, elderly woman with soft white hair and no hat, dressed in black; and a much younger woman, thin and tall and dark like a gipsy, with no hat and a bright silk scarf round her neck.' "

"Oh, yes. I can think of no explanation, but I understand your position. And now I think we had better have the girl in, but before we do I should like to say—"

The door opened noiselessly, and old Mrs. Sharpe appeared on the threshold. The short pieces of white hair round her face stood up on end, as her pillow had left them, and she looked more than ever like a sibyl.

She pushed the door to behind her and surveyed the gathering with a malicious interest.

"Hah!" she said, making a sound like the throaty squawk of a hen. "Three strange men!"

"Let me present them, Mother," Marion said, as the three got to their feet.

"This is Mr. Blair, of Blair, Hayward, and Bennet-the firm who have that lovely house at the top of the High Street."

As Robert bowed the old woman fixed him with her seagull's eye.

"Needs re-tilling," she said.

It did, but it was not the greeting he had expected.

It comforted him a little that her greeting to Grant was even more unorthodox. Far from being impressed or agitated by the presence of Scotland Yard in her drawing-room of a spring afternoon, she merely said in her dry voice: "You should not be sitting in that chair; you are much too heavy for it."

When her daughter introduced the local Inspector she cast one glance at him, moved her head an inch, and quite obviously dismissed him from further consideration. This, Hallam, to judge by his expression, found peculiarly shattering.

Grant looked inquiringly at Miss Sharpe.

"I'll tell you," she said. "Mother, the Inspector wants us to see a young girl who is waiting in a car outside the gate. She was missing from her home near Aylesbury for a month, and when she turned up again—in a distressed condition—she said that she had been detained by people who wanted to make a servant of her. They kept her locked up when she refused, and beat and starved her. She described the place and the people minutely, and it so happens that you and I fit the description admirably. So does our house. The suggestion is that she was detained up in our attic with the round window."

"Remarkably interesting," said the old lady, seating herself with deliberation on an Empire sofa. "What did we beat her with?"

"A dog whip, I understand."

"Have we got a dog whip?"

"We have one of those 'lead' things, I think. They make a whip if necessary. But the point is, the Inspector would like us to meet this girl, so that she can say if we are the people who detained her or not."

"Have you any objections, Mrs. Sharpe?" Grant asked.

"On the contrary, Inspector. I look forward to the meeting with impatience. It is not every afternoon, I assure you, that I go to my rest a dull old woman and rise a potential monster."

"Then if you will excuse me, I shall bring-"

Hallam made a motion, offering himself as messenger, but Grant shook his head. It was obvious that he wanted to be present when the girl first saw what was beyond the gate.

As the Inspector went out Marion Sharpe explained Blair's presence to her mother. "It was extraordinarily kind of him to come at such short notice and so quickly," she added, and Robert felt again the impact of that bright pale old eye. For his money, old Mrs. Sharpe was quite capable of beating seven different people between breakfast and lunch, any day of the week.

"You have my sympathy, Mr. Blair," she said, unsympathetically.

"Why, Mrs. Sharpe?"

"I take it that Broadmoor is a little out of your line."

"Broadmoor!"

"Criminal lunacy."

"I find it extraordinarily stimulating," Robert said, refusing to be bullied by her.

This drew a flash of appreciation from her; something that was like the shadow of a smile. Robert had the odd feeling that she suddenly liked him; but if so she was making no verbal confession of it. Her dry voice said tartly: "Yes, I expect the distractions of Milford are scarce and mild. My daughter pursues a piece of gutta-percha round the golf course—"

"It is not gutta-percha any more, Mother," her daughter put in.

"But at my age Milford does not provide even that distraction. I am reduced to pouring weedkiller on weeds—a legitimate form of sadism on a par with drowning fleas. Do you drown your fleas, Mr. Blair?"

"No, I squash them. But I have a sister who used to pursue them with a cake of soap."

"Soap?" said Mrs. Sharpe, with genuine interest.

"I understand that she hit them with the soft side and they stuck to it."

"How very interesting. A technique I have not met before. I must try that next time."

With his other ear he heard that Marion was being nice to the snubbed Inspector. "You play a very good game, Inspector," she was saying.

He was conscious of the feeling you get near the end of a dream, when waking is just round the corner, that none of the inconsequence really matters because presently you'll be back in the real world.

This was misleading because the real world came through the door with the return of Inspector Grant. Grant came in first, so that he was in a position to see the expressions on all the faces concerned, and held the door open for a police matron and a girl.

Marion Sharpe stood up slowly, as if the better to face anything that might be coming to her, but her mother remained seated on the sofa as one giving an audience, her Victorian back as flat as it had been as a young girl, her hands lying composedly in her lap. Even her wild hair could not detract from the impression that she was mistress of the situation.

The girl was wearing her school coat, and childish low-heeled clumpish black school shoes; and consequently looked younger than Blair had anticipated. She was not very tall, and certainly not pretty. But she had—what was the word?—appeal. Her eyes, a darkish blue, were set wide apart in a face of the type popularly referred to as heart-shaped. Her hair was mouse-coloured, but grew off her forehead in a good line. Below each cheek-bone a slight hollow, a miracle of delicate modelling, gave the face charm and pathos. Her lower lip was full, but the mouth was too small. So were her ears. Too small and too close to her head.

An ordinary sort of girl, after all. Not the sort you would notice in a croc. Not at all the type to be the heroine of a sensation. Robert wondered what she would look like in other clothes.

The girl's glance rested first on the old woman, and then went on to Marion. The glance held neither surprise nor triumph and not much interest.

"Yes, these are the women," she said.

"You have no doubt about it?" Grant asked her, and added: "It is a very grave accusation, you know."

"No, I have no doubt. How could I?"

"These two ladies are the women who detained you, took your clothes from you, forced you to mend linen, and whipped you?"

"A remarkable liar," said old Mrs. Sharpe, in the tone in which one says, "A remarkable likeness."

"Yes, these are the women."

"You say that we took you into the kitchen for coffee," Marion said.

"Yes, you did."

"Can you describe the kitchen?"

"I didn't pay much attention. It was a big one—with a stone floor, I think—and a row of bells."

"What kind of stove?"

"I didn't notice the stove, but the pan the old woman heated the coffee in was a pale blue enamel one with a dark blue edge and a lot of chips off round the bottom edge."

"I doubt if there is any kitchen in England that hasn't a pan exactly like that," Marion said. "We have three of them."

"Is the girl a virgin?" asked Mrs. Sharpe, in the mildly interested tone of a person inquiring: "Is it a Chanel?"

In the startled pause that this produced Robert was aware of Hallam's scandalised face, the hot blood running up into the girl's, and the fact that there was no protesting "Mother!" from the daughter as he unconsciously, but confidently, expected. He wondered whether her silence was tacit approval, or whether after a lifetime with Mrs. Sharpe she was shockproof.

Grant said in cold reproof that the matter was irrelevant.

"You think so?" said the old lady. "If I had been missing for a month from my home it is the first thing that my mother would have wanted to know about me. However. Now that the girl has identified us, what do you propose to do? Arrest us?"

"Oh, no. Things are a long way from that at the moment. I want to take Miss Kane to the kitchen and the attic, so that her descriptions of them can be verified. If they are, I report on the case to my superior and he decides in conference what further steps to take."

"I see. A most admirable caution, Inspector." She rose slowly to her feet. "Ah, well, if you will excuse me I shall go back to my interrupted rest."

"But don't you want to be present when Miss Kane inspects—to hear the—" blurted Grant, surprised for once out of his composure.

"Oh, dear, no." She smoothed down her black gown with a slight frown. "They split invisible atoms," she remarked testily, "but no one so far has invented a material that does not crease. I have not the faintest doubt," she went on, "that Miss Kane will identify the attic. Indeed I should be surprised beyond belief if she failed to."

She began to move towards the door, and consequently towards the girl; and for the first time the girl's eyes lit with expression. A spasm of alarm crossed her face. The police matron came forward a step, protectively. Mrs. Sharpe continued her unhurried progress and came to rest a yard or so from the girl, so that they were face to face. For a full five seconds there was silence while she examined the girl's face with interest.

"For two people who are on beating terms, we are distressingly ill acquainted," she said at last. "I hope to know you much better before this affair is finished, Miss Kane." She turned to Robert and bowed. "Goodbye, Mr. Blair. I hope you will continue to find us stimulating." And, ignoring the rest of the gathering, she walked out of the door that Hallam held open for her.

There was a distinct feeling of anti-climax now that she was no longer there, and Robert paid her the tribute of a reluctant admiration. It was no small achievement to steal the interest from an outraged heroine.

"You have no objection to letting Miss Kane see the relevant parts of the house, Miss Sharpe?" Grant asked.

"Of course not. But before we go further I should like to say what I was going to say before you brought Miss Kane in. I am glad that Miss Kane is present to hear it now. It is this. I have never to my knowledge seen this girl before. I did not give her a lift anywhere, on any occasion. She was not brought into this house either by me or by my mother, nor was she kept here. I should like that to be clearly understood."

"Very well, Miss Sharpe. It is understood that your attitude is a complete denial of the girl's story." "A complete denial from beginning to end. And now, will you come and see the kitchen?"

Grant and the girl accompanied Robert and Marion Sharpe on the inspection of the house, while Hallam and the police matron waited in the drawing-room. As they reached the first-floor landing, after the girl had identified the kitchen, Robert said:

"Miss Kane said that the second flight of stairs was covered in 'something hard,' but the same carpet continues up from the first flight."

"Only to the curve," Marion said. "The bit that 'shows.' Round the corner it is drugget. A Victorian way of economising. Nowadays if you are poor you buy less expensive carpet and use it all the way up. But those were still the days when what the neighbours thought mattered. So the lush stuff went as far as eye could see and no further."

The girl had been right about the third flight, too. The treads of the short flight to the attic were bare.

The all-important attic was a low square little box of a room, with the ceiling slanting abruptly down on three sides in conformity with the slate roof outside. It was lit only by the round window looking out to the front. A short stretch of slates sloped from below the window to the low white parapet. The window was divided into four panes, one of which showed a badly starred crack. It had never been made to open.

The attic was completely bare of furnishing. Unnaturally bare, Robert thought, for so convenient and accessible a storeroom.

"There used to be stuff here when we first came," Marion said, as if answering him. "But when we found that we should be without help half the time we got rid of it."

Grant turned to the girl with a questioning air.

"The bed was in that corner," she said, pointing to the corner away from the window. "And next it was the wooden commode. And in this corner behind the door there were three empty travelling cases—two suitcases and a trunk with a flat top. There was a chair but she took it away after I tried to break the window." She referred to Marion without emotion, as if she were not present. "There is where I tried to break the window."

It seemed to Robert that the crack looked much more than a few weeks old; but there was no denying that the crack was there.

Grant crossed to the far corner and bent to examine the bare floor, but it did not need close examination. Even from where he was standing by the door Robert could see the marks of castors on the floor where the bed had stood.

"There was a bed there," Marion said. "It was one of the things we got rid of."

"What did you do with it?"

"Let me think. Oh, we gave it to the cowman's wife over at Staples Farm. Her eldest boy got too big to share a room with the others any more and she put him up in their loft. We get our dairy stuff from Staples. You can't see it from here but it is only four fields away over the rise."

"Where do you keep your spare trunks, Miss Sharpe? Have you another box-room?"

For the first time Marion hesitated. "We do have a large square trunk with a flat top, but my mother uses it to store things in. When we inherited The Franchise there was a very valuable tall-boy in the bedroom my mother has, and we sold it, and used the big trunk instead. With a chintz cover on it. My suitcases I keep in the cupboard on the first-floor landing."

"Miss Kane, do you remember what the cases looked like?"

"Oh, yes. One was a brown leather with those sort-of caps at the corners, and the other was one of those American-looking canvas-covered ones with stripes."

Well, that was definite enough.

Grant examined the room a little longer, studied the view from the window, and then turned to go.

"May we see the suitcases in the cupboard?" he asked Marion.

"Certainly," Marion said, but she seemed unhappy.

On the lower landing she opened the cupboard door and stood back to let the Inspector look. As Robert moved out of their way he caught the unguarded flash of triumph on the girl's face. It so altered her calm, rather childish, face that it shocked him. It was a savage emotion, primitive and cruel. And very startling on the face of a demure schoolgirl who was the pride of her guardians and preceptors.

The cupboard contained shelves bearing household linen, and on the floor four suitcases. Two were expanding ones, one of pressed fibre and one of rawhide; the other two were: a brown cowhide with protected corners, and a square canvas-covered hatbox with a broad band of multi-coloured stripes down the middle.

"Are these the cases?" Grant asked.

"Yes," the girl said. "Those two."

"I am not going to disturb my mother again this afternoon," Marion said, with sudden anger. "I acknowledge that the trunk in her room is large and flat-topped. It has been there without interruption for the last three years."

"Very good, Miss Sharpe. And now the garage, if you please."

Down at the back of the house, where the stables had been converted long ago into a garage, the little group stood and surveyed the battered old grey car. Grant read out the girl's untechnical description of it as recorded in her statement. It fitted,

but it would fit equally well at least a thousand cars on the roads of Britain today, Blair thought. It was hardly evidence at all. "'One of the wheels was painted a different shade from the others and didn't look as if it belonged. The different wheel was the one in front on my side as it was standing at the pavement,' "Grant finished.

In silence the four people looked at the darker grey of the near front wheel. There seemed nothing to say.

"Thank you very much, Miss Sharpe," Grant said at length, shutting his notebook and putting it away. "You have been very courteous and helpful and I am grateful to you. I shall be able to get you on the telephone any time in the next few days, I suppose, if I want to talk to you further?"

"Oh, yes, Inspector. We have no intention of going anywhere."

If Grant was aware of her too-ready comprehension he did not show it.

He handed over the girl to the matron and they left without a backward glance. Then he and Hallam took their leave, Hallam still with an air of apologising for trespass.

Marion had gone out into the hall with them, leaving Blair in the drawing-room, and when she came back she was carrying a tray with sherry and glasses.

"I don't ask you to stay for dinner," she said, putting down the tray and beginning to pour the wine, "partly because our 'dinner' is usually a very scratch supper and not at all what you are used to. (Did you know that your aunt's meals are famous in Milford? Even I had heard about them.) And partly because—well, because, as my mother said, Broadmoor is a little out of your line, I expect."

"About that," Robert said. "You do realise, don't you, that the girl has an enormous advantage over you. In the matter of evidence, I mean. She is free to describe almost any object she likes as being part of your household. If it happens to be there, that is strong evidence for her. If it happens not to be there, that is not evidence for you; the inference is merely that you have got rid of it. If the suitcases, for instance, had not been there, she could say that you had got rid of them because they had been in the attic and could be described."

"But she did describe them, without ever having seen them."

"She described two suitcases, you mean. If your four suitcases had been a matching set she would have only one chance in perhaps five of being right. But because you happened to have one of each of the common kinds her chances worked out at about even."

He picked up the glass of sherry that she had set down beside him, took a mouthful, and was astonished to find it admirable.

She smiled a little at him and said: "We economise, but not on wine," and he flushed slightly, wondering if his surprise had been as obvious as that.

"But there was the odd wheel of the car. How did she know about that? The whole set-up is extraordinary. How did she know about my mother and me, and what the house looked like? Our gates are never open. Even if she opened them—though what she could be doing on that lonely road I can't imagine—even if she opened them and looked inside she would not know about my mother and me."

"No chance of her having made friends with a maid? Or a gardener?"

"We have never had a gardener, because there is nothing but grass. And we have not had a maid for a year. Just a girl from the farm who comes in once a week and does the rough cleaning."

Robert said sympathetically that it was a big house to have on her hands unaided.

"Yes; but two things help. I am not a house-proud woman. And it is still so wonderful to have a home of our own that I am willing to put up with the disadvantages. Old Mr. Crowle was my father's cousin, but we didn't know him at all. My mother and I had always lived in a Kensington boarding-house." One corner of her mouth moved up in a wry smile. "You can imagine how popular Mother was with the residents." The smile faded. "My father died when I was very little. He was one of those optimists who are always going to be rich tomorrow. When he found one day that his speculations had not left even enough for a loaf of bread on the morrow, he committed suicide and left Mother to face things."

Robert felt that this to some extent explained Mrs. Sharpe.

"I was not trained for a profession, my life has been spent in odd-jobs. Not domestic ones—I loathe domesticity—but helping in those lady-like businesses that abound in Kensington. Lampshades, or advising on holidays, or flowers, or bric-à-brac. When old Mr. Crowle died I was working in a tea-shop—one of those morning-coffee gossip shops. Yes, it is a little difficult."

"What is?"

"To imagine me among the tea-cups."

Robert, unused to having his mind read—Aunt Lin was incapable of following anyone's mental processes even when they were explained to her—was disconcerted. But she was not thinking of him.

"We had just begun to feel settled down, and at home, and safe, when this happened."

For the first time since she had asked his help Robert felt the stirring of partisanship. "And all because a slip of a girl needs an alibi," he said. "We must find out more about Betty Kane."

"I can tell you one thing about her. She is over-sexed."

"Is that just feminine intuition?"

"No. I am not very feminine and I have no intuition. But I have never known anyone—man or woman—with that colour of eye who wasn't. That opaque dark blue, like a very faded navy—it's infallible."

Robert smiled at her indulgently. She was very feminine after all.

"And don't feel superior because it happens not to be lawyers' logic," she added. "Have a look round at your own friends, and see."

Before he could stop himself he thought of Gerald Blunt, the Milford scandal. Assuredly Gerald had slate-blue eyes. So had Arthur Wallis, the potman at The White Hart, who was paying three different monetary levies weekly. So had—Damn the woman, she had no right to make a silly generalisation like that and be right about it.

"It is fascinating to speculate on what she really did during that month," Marion said. "It affords me intense satisfaction that someone beat her black and blue. At least there is one person in this world who has arrived at a correct estimate of her. I hope I meet him someday, so that I may shake his hand."

"Him?"

"With those eyes it is bound to be a 'him.' "

"Well," Robert said, preparing to go, "I doubt very much whether Grant has a case that he will want to present in court. It would be the girl's word against yours, with no other backing on either side. Against *you* would be her statement: so detailed, so circumstantial. Against *ber* would be the inherent unlikeliness of the story. I don't think he could hope to get a verdict."

"But the thing is there, whether he brings it into court or not. And not only in the files of Scotland Yard. Sooner or later a thing like that begins to be whispered about. It would be no comfort to us not to have the thing cleared up."

"Oh, it will be cleared up, if I have anything to do with it. But I think we wait for a day or two to see what the Yard mean to do about it. They have far better facilities for arriving at the truth than we are ever likely to have."

"Coming from a lawyer, that is a touching tribute to the honesty of the police."

"Believe me, truth may be a virtue, but Scotland Yard discovered long ago that it is a business asset. It doesn't pay them to be satisfied with anything less."

"If he did bring it to court," she said, coming to the door with him, "and did get a verdict, what would that mean for us?"

"I'm not sure whether it would be two years' imprisonment or seven years' penal servitude. I told you I was a broken reed where criminal procedure is concerned. But I shall look it up."

"Yes, do," she said. "There's quite a difference."

He decided that he liked her habit of mockery. Especially in the face of a criminal charge.

"Goodbye," she said. "It was kind of you to come. You have been a great comfort to me."

And Robert, remembering how nearly he had thrown her to Ben Carley, blushed to himself as he walked to the gate.

 $H_{
m ave}$ you had a busy day, dear?" Aunt Lin asked, opening her table napkin and arranging it across her plump lap.

This was a sentence that made sense but had no meaning. It was as much an overture to dinner as the spreading of her napkin, and the exploratory movement of her right foot as she located the footstool which compensated for her short legs. She expected no answer; or rather, being unaware that she had asked the question, she did not listen to his answer.

Robert looked up the table at her with a more conscious benevolence than usual. After his uncharted step-picking at The Franchise, the serenity of Aunt Lin's presence was very comforting, and he looked with a new awareness at the solid little figure with the short neck and the round pink face and the iron-grey hair that frizzed out from its large hairpins. Linda Bennet led a life of recipes, film stars, god-children, and church bazaars, and found it perfect. Well-being and contentment enveloped her like a cloak. She read the Women's Page of the daily paper (How To Make A Boutonnière From Old Kid Gloves) and nothing else as far as Robert was aware. Occasionally when she tidied away the paper that Robert had left lying about, she would pause to read the headlines and comment on them. ("MAN ENDS EIGHTY-TWO DAY FAST"—Silly creature! "OIL DISCOVERY IN BAHAMAS"—Did I tell you that paraffin is up a penny, dear?) But she gave the impression of never really believing that the world the papers reported did in fact exist. The world for Aunt Lin began with Robert Blair and ended within a ten-mile radius of him.

"What kept you so late tonight, dear?" she asked, having finished her soup.

From long experience Robert recognised this as being in a different category from: "Have you had a busy day, dear?"

"I had to go out to The Franchise—that house on the Larborough road. They wanted some legal advice."

"Those odd people? I didn't know you knew them."

"I didn't. They just wanted my advice."

"I hope they pay you for it, dear. They have no money at all, you know. The father was in some kind of importing business—monkey-nuts or something—and drank himself to death. Left them without a penny, poor things. Old Mrs. Sharpe ran a boarding-house in London to make ends meet, and the daughter was maid-of-all-work. They were just going to be turned into the street with their furniture, when the old man at The Franchise died. So providential!"

"Aunt Lin! Where do you get those stories?"

"But it's true, dear. Perfectly true. I forget who told me—someone who had stayed in the same street in London—but it was first-hand, anyhow. I am not one to pass on idle gossip, as you know. Is it a nice house? I always wondered what was inside that iron gate."

"No, rather ugly. But they have some nice pieces of furniture."

"Not as well kept as ours, I'll be bound," she said, looking complacently at the perfect sideboard and the beautiful chairs ranged against the wall. "The vicar said yesterday that if this house were not so obviously a home it would be a show place." Mention of the clergy seemed to remind her of something. "By the way, will you be extra patient with Christina for the next few days. I think she is going to be 'saved' again."

"Oh, poor Aunt Lin, what a bore for you. But I was afraid of it. There was a 'text' in the saucer of my early-morning tea today. 'Thou God seest me' on a pink scroll, with a tasteful design of Easter lilies in the background. Is she changing her church again, then?"

"Yes. She has discovered that the Methodists are 'whited sepulchres,' it seems, so she is going to those 'Bethel' people above Benson's bakery, and is due to be 'saved' any day now. She has been shouting hymns all the morning."

"But she always does."

"Not 'sword of the Lord' ones. As long as she sticks to 'pearly crowns' or 'streets of gold' I know it is all right. But once she begins on the 'sword of the Lord' I know that it will be my turn to do the baking presently."

"Well, darling, you bake just as well as Christina."

"Oh, no, she doesn't," said Christina, coming in with the meat course. A big soft creature with untidy straight hair and a vague eye. "Only one thing your Aunt Lin makes better than me, Mr. Robert, and that's hot cross buns, and that's only once a year. So there! And if I'm not appreciated in this house, I'll go where I will be."

"Christina, my love!" Robert said, "you know very well that no one could imagine this house without you, and if you left I should follow you to the world's end. For your butter tarts, if for nothing else. Can we have butter tarts tomorrow, by the way?"

"Butter tarts are no food for unrepentant sinners. Besides I don't think I have the butter. But we'll see. Meanwhile, Mr. Robert, you examine your soul and stop casting stones."

Aunt Lin sighed gently as the door closed behind her. "Twenty years," she said meditatively. "You won't remember her when she first came from the orphanage. Fifteen, and so skinny, poor little brat. She ate a whole loaf for her tea, and said she would pray for me all her life. I think she has, you know."

Something like a tear glistened in Miss Bennet's blue eye.

"I hope she postpones the salvation until she has made those butter tarts," said Robert, brutally materialistic. "Did you enjoy your picture?"

"Well, dear, I couldn't forget that he had five wives."

"Who has?"

"Had, dear. One at a time. Gene Darrow. I must say, those little programmes they give away are very informative but a little disillusioning. He was a student, you see. In the picture, I mean. Very young and romantic. But I kept remembering those five wives, and it spoiled the afternoon for me. So charming to look at too. They say he dangled his third wife out of a fifth-story window by the wrists, but I don't really believe that. He doesn't look strong enough, for one thing. Looks as if he had chest trouble as a child. That peaky look, and thin wrists. Not strong enough to dangle anyone. Certainly not out of a fifth-storey..."

The gentle monologue went on, all through the pudding course; and Robert withdrew his attention and thought about The Franchise. He came to the surface as they rose from table and moved into the sitting-room for coffee.

"It is the most becoming garment, if maids would only realise it," she was saying.

"What is?"

"An apron. She was a maid in the palace, you know, and wore one of those silly little bits of muslin. So becoming. Did those people at The Franchise have a maid, by the way? No? Well, I am not surprised. They starved the last one, you know. Gave her "

"Oh, Aunt Lin!"

"I assure you. For breakfast she got the crusts they cut off the roast. And when they had milk pudding . . . "

Robert did not hear what enormity was born of the milk pudding. In spite of his good dinner he was suddenly tired and depressed. If kind silly Aunt Lin saw no harm in repeating those absurd stories, what would the real gossips of Milford achieve with the stuff of a real scandal?

"And talking of maids—the brown sugar is finished, dear, so you will have to have lump for tonight—talking of maids, the Carleys' little maid has got herself into trouble."

"You mean someone else has got her into trouble."

"Yes. Arthur Wallis, the potman at The White Hart."

"What, Wallis again!"

"Yes, it really is getting past a joke, isn't it. I can't think why the man doesn't get married. It would be much cheaper."

But Robert was not listening. He was back in the drawing-room at The Franchise, being gently mocked for his legal intolerance of a generalisation. Back in the shabby room with the unpolished furniture, where things lay about on chairs and no one bothered to tidy them away.

And where, now he came to think of it, no one ran around after him with an ash-tray.

It was more than a week later that Mr. Heseltine put his thin small grey head round Robert's door to say that Inspector Hallam was in the office and would like to see him for a moment.

The room on the opposite side of the hall where Mr. Heseltine lorded it over the clerks was always referred to as "the office," although both Robert's room and the little one behind it used by Nevil Bennet were, in spite of their carpets and their mahogany, plainly offices too. There was an official waiting-room behind "the office," a small room corresponding to young Bennet's, but it had never been popular with the Blair, Hayward, and Bennet clients. Callers stepped into the office to announce themselves and usually stayed there gossiping until such time as Robert was free to see them. The little "waiting-room" had long ago been appropriated by Miss Tuff for writing Robert's letters in, away from the distraction of visitors and from the office-

When Mr. Heseltine had gone away to fetch the Inspector, Robert noticed with surprise that he was apprehensive as he had not been apprehensive since in the days of his youth he approached a list of Examination Results pinned on a board. Was his life so placid that a stranger's dilemma should stir it to that extent? Or was it that the Sharpes had been so constantly in his thoughts for the last week that they had ceased to be strangers?

He braced himself for whatever Hallam was going to say; but what emerged from Hallam's careful phrases was that Scotland Yard had let them understand that no proceedings would be taken on the present evidence. Blair noticed the "present evidence" and gauged its meaning accurately. They were not dropping the case—did the Yard ever drop a case?—they were merely sitting

The thought of Scotland Yard sitting quiet was not a particularly reassuring one in the circumstances.

"I take it that they lacked corroborative evidence," he said.

"They couldn't trace the lorry driver who gave her the lift," Hallam said.

"That wouldn't surprise them."

"No," Hallam agreed, "no driver is going to risk the sack by confessing he gave anyone a lift. Especially a girl. Transport bosses are strict about that. And when it is a case of a girl in trouble of some kind, and when it's the police that are doing the asking, no man in his senses is going to own up to even having seen her." He took the cigarette that Robert offered him. "They needed that lorry driver," he said. "Or something like him," he added.
"Yes," Robert said, reflectively. "What did you make of her, Hallam?"

"The girl? I don't know. Nice kid. Seemed quite genuine. Might have been one of my own."

This, Blair realised, was a very good sample of what they would be up against if it ever came to a case. To every man of good feeling the girl in the witness box would look like his own daughter. Not because she was a waif, but for the very good reason that she wasn't. The decent school coat, the mousy hair, the unmade-up young face with its appealing hollow below the cheekbone, the wide-set candid eyes—it was a prosecuting counsel's dream of a victim.

"Just like any other girl of her age," Hallam said, still considering it. "Nothing against her."

"So you don't judge people by the colour of their eyes," Robert said idly, his mind still on the girl.

"Ho! Don't I!" said Hallam surprisingly. "Believe me, there's a particular shade of baby blue that condemns a man, as far as I'm concerned, before he has opened his mouth. Plausible liars every one of them." He paused to pull on his cigarette. "Given to murder, too, come to think of it—though I haven't met many killers."

"You alarm me," Robert said. "In the future I shall give baby-blue eyes a wide berth."

Hallam grinned. "As long as you keep your pocket book shut you needn't worry. All Baby-Blue's lies are for money. He only murders when he gets too entangled in his lies. The real murderer's mark is not the colour of the eyes but their setting."

"Yes. They are set differently. The two eyes, I mean. They look as if they belonged to different faces."

"I thought you hadn't met many."

"No, but I've read all the case histories and studied the photographs. I've always been surprised that no book on murder mentions it, it happens so often. The inequality of setting, I mean."

"So it's entirely your own theory."

"The result of my own observation, yes. You ought to have a go at it sometime. Fascinating. I've got to the stage where I look for it now."

"In the street, you mean?"

"No, not quite as bad as that. But in each new murder case. I wait for the photograph, and when it comes I think: 'There! What did I tell you!""

"And when the photograph comes and the eyes are of a mathematical identity?"

"Then it is nearly always what one might call an accidental murder. The kind of murder that might happen to anyone given the circumstances."

"And when you turn up a photograph of the revered vicar of Nethar Dumbleton who is being given a presentation by his grateful parishioners to mark his fiftieth year of devoted service, and you note that the setting of his eyes is widely unequal, what conclusion do you come to?"

"That his wife satisfies him, his children obey him, his stipend is sufficient for his needs, he has no politics, he gets on with the local big-wigs, and he is allowed to have the kind of services he wants. In fact, he has never had the slightest need to murder anyone."

"It seems to me that you are having your cake and eating it very nicely."

"Huh!" Hallam said disgustedly. "Just wasting good police observation on a legal mind. I'd have thought," he added, moving to go, "that a lawyer would be glad of some free tips about judging perfect strangers."

"All you are doing," Robert pointed out, "is corrupting an innocent mind. I shall never be able to inspect a new client from now on without my subconscious registering the colour of his eyes and the symmetry of their setting."

"Well, that's something. It's about time you knew some of the facts of life."

"Thank you for coming to tell me about the 'Franchise' affair," Robert said, returning to sobriety.

"The telephone in this town," Hallam said, "is about as private as the radio."

"Anyhow, thank you. I must let the Sharpes know at once."

As Hallam took his leave, Robert lifted the telephone receiver.

He could not, as Hallam said, talk freely over the telephone, but he would say that he was coming out to see them immediately and that the news was good. That would take the present weight off their minds. It would also—he glanced at his watch—be time for Mrs. Sharpe's daily rest, so perhaps he would have a hope of avoiding the old dragon. And also a hope of a tête-à-tête with Marion Sharpe, of course; though he left that thought unformulated at the back of his mind.

But there was no answer to his call.

With the bored and reluctant aid of the Exchange he rang the number for a solid five minutes, without result. The Sharpes were not at home.

While he was still engaged with the Exchange, Nevil Bennet strolled in clad in his usual outrageous tweed, a pinkish shirt, and a purple tie. Robert, eyeing him over the receiver, wondered for the hundredth time what was going to become of Blair, Hayward, and Bennet when it at last slipped from his good Blair grasp into the hands of this young sprig of the Bennets. That the boy had brains he knew, but brains wouldn't take him far in Milford. Milford expected a man to stop being undergraduate when he reached graduate age. But there was no sign of Nevil's acceptance of the world outside his coterie. He was still actively, if unconsciously, épatéing that world. As his clothes bore witness.

It was not that Robert had any desire to see the boy in customary suits of solemn black. His own suit was a grey tweed; and his country clientèle would look doubtfully on "town" clothes. ("That awful little man with the striped suits," Marion Sharpe had said of the town-clad lawyer, in that unguarded moment on the telephone.) But there were tweeds and tweeds, and Nevil Bennet's were the second kind. Quite outrageously the second kind.

"Robert," Nevil said, as Robert gave it up and laid down the receiver, "I've finished the papers on the Calthorpe transfer, and I thought I would run into Larborough this afternoon, if you haven't anything you want me to do."

"Can't you talk to her on the telephone?" Robert asked; Nevil being engaged, in the casual modern fashion, to the Bishop of Larborough's third daughter.

"Oh, it isn't Rosemary. She is in London for a week."

"A protest meeting at the Albert Hall, I suppose," said Robert, who was feeling disgruntled because of his failure to speak to the Sharpes when he was primed with good news for them.

"No, at the Guildhall," Nevil said. "What is it this time? Vivisection?"

"You are frightfully last-century now and then, Robert," Nevil said, with his air of solemn patience. "No one objects to vivisection nowadays except a few cranks. The protest is against this country's refusal to give shelter to the patriot Kotovich."

"The said patriot is very badly 'wanted' in his own country, I understand."

"By his enemies; yes."

"By the police; for two murders."

"Executions."

"You a disciple of John Knox, Nevil?"

"Good God, no. What has that to do with it?"

"He believed in self-appointed executioners. The idea has a little 'gone out' in this country, I understand. Anyhow, if it's a choice between Rosemary's opinion of Kotovich and the opinion of the Special Branch, I'll take the Special Branch.'

"The Special Branch only do what the Foreign Office tells them. Everyone knows that. But if I stay and explain the ramifications of the Kotovich affair to you, I shall be late for the film."

"What film?"

"The French film I am going into Larborough to see."

"I suppose you know that most of those French trifles that the British intelligentsia bate their breath about are considered very so-so in their own country? However. Do you think you could pause long enough to drop a note into the letter-box of The Franchise as you go by?"

"I might. I always wanted to see what was inside that wall. Who lives there now?"

"An old woman and her daughter."

"Daughter?" repeated Nevil, automatically pricking his ears.

"Middle-aged daughter."

"Oh. All right, I'll just get my coat."

Robert wrote merely that he had tried to talk to them, that he had to go out on business for an hour or so, but that he would ring them up again when he was free, and that Scotland Yard had no case, as the case stood, and acknowledged the fact.

Nevil swept in with a dreadful raglan affair over his arm, snatched up the letter and disappeared with a "Tell Aunt Lin I may be late. She asked me over to dinner."

Robert donned his own sober grey hat and walked over to the Rose and Crown to meet his client—an old farmer, and the last man in England to suffer from chronic gout. The old man was not yet there, and Robert, usually so placid, so lazily goodnatured, was conscious of impatience. The pattern of his life had changed. Up to now it had been an even succession of equal attractions; he had gone from one thing to another without hurry and without emotion. Now there was a focus of interest, and the rest revolved round it.

He sat down on one of the chintz-covered chairs in the lounge and looked at the dog-eared journals lying on the adjacent coffee table. The only current number was *The Watchman*, the weekly review, and he picked it up reluctantly, thinking yet once more how the dry feel of the paper offended his finger tips and its serrated edges set his own teeth on edge. It was the usual collection of protests, poems, and pedantry; the place of honour among the protests being accorded to Nevil's future father-in-law, who spread himself for three-quarters of a column on England's shame in that she refused sanctuary to a fugitive patriot.

The Bishop of Larborough had long ago extended the Christian philosophy to include the belief that the underdog is always right. He was wildly popular with Balkan revolutionaries, British strike committees, and all the old lags in the local penal establishment. (The sole exception to this last being that chronic recidivist, Bandy Brayne, who held the good bishop in vast contempt, and reserved his affection for the Governor; to whom a tear in the eye was just a drop of H_2O , and who unpicked his most heartbreaking tales with a swift, unemotional accuracy.) There was *nothing*, said the old lags affectionately, that the old boy would not believe; you could lay it on with a trowel.

Normally Robert found the Bishop mildly amusing, but today he was merely irritated. He tried two poems, neither of which made sense to him, and flung the thing back on the table.

"England in the wrong again?" asked Ben Carley, pausing by his chair and jerking a head at The Watchman.

"Hullo, Carley."

"A Marble Arch for the well-to-do," the little lawyer said, flicking the paper scornfully with a nicotine-stained finger. "Have a drink?"

"Thanks, but I'm waiting for old Mr. Wynyard. He doesn't move a step more than he need, nowadays."

"No, poor old boy. The sins of the fathers. Awful to be suffering for the port you never drank! I saw your car outside The Franchise the other day."

"Yes," said Robert, and wondered a little. It was unlike Ben Carley to be blunt. And if he had seen Robert's car he had also seen the police cars.

"If you know them you'll be able to tell me something. I always wanted to know about them. Is the rumour true?"

"Rumour?"

"Are they witches?"

"Are they supposed to be?" said Robert lightly.

"There's a strong support for the belief in the countryside, I understand," Carley said, his bright black eyes resting for a moment on Robert's with intention, and then going on to wander over the lounge with their habitual quick interrogation.

Robert understood that the little man was offering him, tacitly, information that he thought ought to be useful to him.

"Ah well," Robert said, "since entertainment came into the country with the cinema, God bless it, an end has been put to witch-hunting."

"Don't you believe it. Give these midland morons a good excuse and they'll witch-hunt with the best. An inbred crowd of degenerates, if you ask me. Here's your old boy. Well, I'll be seeing you."

It was one of Robert's chief attractions that he was genuinely interested in people and in their troubles, and he listened to old Mr. Wynyard's rambling story with a kindness that won the old man's gratitude—and added, although he was unaware of it, a hundred to the sum that stood against his name in the old farmer's will—but as soon as their business was over he made straight for the hotel telephone.

There were far too many people about, and he decided to use the one in the garage over in Sin Lane. The office would be shut by now, and anyhow it was further away. And if he telephoned from the garage, so his thoughts went as he strode across the street, he would have his car at hand if she—if they asked him to come out and discuss the business further, as they very well might, as they almost certainly would—yes, of course they would want to discuss what they could do to discredit the girl's story, whether there was to be a case or not—he had been so relieved over Hallam's news that he had not yet come round in his mind to considering what—

"Evening, Mr. Blair," Bill Brough said, oozing his large person out of the narrow office door, his round calm face bland and welcoming. "Want your car?"

"No, I want to use your telephone first, if I may."

"Sure. Go ahead."

Stanley, who was under a car, poked his fawn's face out and asked:

"Know anything?"

"Not a thing, Stan. Haven't had a bet for months."

"I'm two pounds down on a cow called Bright Promise. That's what comes of putting your faith in horseflesh. Next time you'll know something—"

"Next time I have a bet I'll tell you. But it will still be horseflesh."

"As long as it's not a cow—" Stanley said, disappearing under the car again; and Robert moved into the hot bright little office and picked up the receiver.

It was Marion who answered, and her voice sounded warm and glad.

"You can't imagine what a relief your note was to us. Both my mother and I have been picking oakum for the last week. Do

they still pick oakum, by the way?"

"I think not. It is something more constructive nowadays, I understand."

"Occupational therapy."

"More or less."

"I can't think of any compulsory sewing that would improve my character."

"They would probably find you something more congenial. It is against modern thought to compel a prisoner to do anything that he doesn't want to."

"That is the first time I have heard you sound tart."

"Was I tart?"

"Pure angostura."

Well, she had reached the subject of drink; perhaps now she would suggest his coming out for sherry before dinner.

"What a charming nephew you have, by the way."

"Nephew?"

"The one who brought the note."

"He is not my nephew," Robert said coldly. Why was it so ageing to be avuncular? "He is my first cousin once removed. But I am glad you liked him." This would not do; he would have to take the bull by the horns. "I should like to see you sometime to discuss what we can do to straighten things out. To make things safer—" He waited.

"Yes, of course. Perhaps we could look in at your office one morning when we are shopping? What kind of thing could we do, do you think?"

"Some kind of private inquiry, perhaps. I can't very well discuss it over the telephone."

"No, of course you can't. How would it do if we came in on Friday morning? That is our weekly shopping day. Or is Friday a busy day for you?"

"No, Friday would be quite convenient," Robert said, swallowing down his disappointment. "About noon?"

"Yes, that would do very well. Twelve o'clock the day after tomorrow, at your office. Goodbye, and thank you again for your support and help."

She rang off, firmly and cleanly, without all the usual preliminary twitterings that Robert had come to expect from women.

"Shall I run her out for you," Bill Brough asked as he came out into the dim daylight of the garage.

"What? Oh, the car. No, I shan't need it tonight, thanks."

He set off on his normal evening walk down the High Street, trying hard not to feel snubbed. He had not been anxious to go to The Franchise in the first instance, and had made his reluctance pretty plain; she was quite naturally avoiding a repetition of the circumstances. That he had identified himself with their interests was a mere business affair, to be resolved in an office, impersonally. They would not again involve him further than that.

All, well, he thought, flinging himself down in his favourite chair by the wood fire in the sitting-room and opening the evening paper (printed that morning in London), when they came to the office on Friday he could do something to put the affair on a more personal basis. To wipe out the memory of that first unhappy refusal.

The quiet of the old house soothed him. Christina had been closeted in her room for two days, in prayer and meditation, and Aunt Lin was in the kitchen preparing dinner. There was a gay letter from Lettice, his only sister, who had driven a truck for several years of a bloody war, fallen in love with a tall silent Canadian, and was now raising five blond brats in Saskatchewan. "Come out soon, Robin dear," she finished, "before the brats grow up and before the moss grows *right* round you. You know how *bad* Aunt Lin is for you!" He could hear her saying it. She and Aunt Lin had never seen eye to eye.

He was smiling, relaxed and reminiscent, when both his quiet and his peace were shattered by the irruption of Nevil.

"Why didn't you *tell* me she was like that!" Nevil demanded.

"Who?"

"The Sharpe woman! Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't expect you would meet her," Robert said. "All you had to do was drop the letter through the door."

"There was nothing in the door to drop it through, so I rang, and they had just come back from wherever they were. Anyhow, *she* answered it."

"I thought she slept in the afternoons."

"I don't believe she ever sleeps. She doesn't belong to the human family at all. She is all compact of fire and metal."

"I know she's a very rude old woman, but you have to make allowances. She has had a very hard—"

"Old? Who are you talking about?"

"Old Mrs. Sharpe, of course."

"I didn't even see old Mrs. Sharpe. I'm talking about Marion."

"Marion Sharpe? And how did you know her name was Marion?"

"She told me. It does suit her, doesn't it? She couldn't be anything but Marion."

"You seem to have become remarkably intimate for a doorstep acquaintance."

"Oh, she gave me tea."

"Tea! I thought you were in a desperate hurry to see a French film."

"I'm never in a desperate hurry to do anything when a woman like Marion Sharpe invites me to tea. Have you noticed her eyes? But of course you have. You're her lawyer. That wonderful shading of grey into hazel. And the way her eyebrows lie above them, like the brushmark of a painter genius. Winged eyebrows, they are. I made a poem about them on the way home. Do you want to hear it?"

"No," Robert said firmly. "Did you enjoy your film?"

"Oh, I didn't go."

"You didn't go!"

"I told you I had tea with Marion instead."

"You mean you have been at The Franchise the whole afternoon!"

"I suppose I have," Nevil said dreamily, "but, my God, it didn't seem more than seven minutes."

"And what happened to your thirst for French cinema?"

"But Marion is French film. Even you must see that!" Robert winced at the "even you." "Why bother with the shadow, when you can be with the reality? Reality. That is her great quality, isn't it? I've never met anyone as real as Marion is."

"Not even Rosemary?" Robert was in the state known to Aunt Lin as "put out."

"Oh, Rosemary is a darling, and I'm going to marry her, but that is quite a different thing."

"Is it?" said Robert, with deceptive meekness.

"Of course. People don't marry women like Marion Sharpe, any more than they marry winds and clouds. Any more than they marry Joan of Arc. It's positively blasphemous to consider marriage in relation to a woman like that. She spoke very nicely of you, by the way."

"That was kind of her."

The tone was so dry that even Nevil caught the flavour of it.

"Don't you like her?" he asked, pausing to look at his cousin in surprised disbelief.

Robert had ceased for the moment to be kind, lazy, tolerant Robert Blair; he was just a tired man who hadn't yet had his dinner and was suffering from the memory of a frustration and a snubbing.

"As far as I am concerned," he said, "Marion Sharpe is just a skinny woman of forty who lives with a rude old mother in an ugly old house, and needs legal advice on occasion like anyone else."

But even as the words came out he wanted to stop them, as if they were a betrayal of a friend.

"No, probably she *isn't* your cup of tea," Nevil said tolerantly. "You have always preferred them a little stupid, and blond, haven't you?" This was said without malice, as one stating a dullish fact.

"I can't imagine why you should think that."

"All the women you nearly married were that type."

"I have never 'nearly married' anyone," Robert said stiffly.

"That's what you think. You'll never know how nearly Molly Manders landed you."

"Molly Manders?" Aunt Lin said, coming in flushed from her cooking and bearing the tray with the sherry. "Such a silly girl. Imagined that you used a baking-board for pancakes. And was always looking at herself in that little pocket mirror of hers."

"Aunt Lin saved you that time, didn't you, Aunt Lin?"

"I don't know what you are talking about, Nevil dear. Do stop prancing about the hearthrug, and put a log on the fire. Did you like your French film, dear?"

"I didn't go. I had tea at The Franchise instead." He shot a glance at Robert, having learned by now that there was more in Robert's reaction than met the eye.

"With those strange people? What did you talk about?"

"Mountains—Maupassant—hens—"

"Hens, dear?"

"Yes; the concentrated evil of a hen's face in a closeup."

Aunt Lin looked vague. She turned to Robert, as to terra firma.

"Had I better call, dear, if you are going to know them? Or ask the vicar's wife to call?"

"I don't think I would commit the vicar's wife to anything so irrevocable," Robert said, dryly.

She looked doubtful for a moment, but household cares obliterated the question in her mind. "Don't dawdle too long over your sherry or what I have in the oven will be spoiled. Thank goodness, Christina will be down again tomorrow. At least I hope so; I have never known her salvation take more than two days. And I don't really think that I will call on those Franchise people, dear, if it is all the same to you. Apart from being strangers and very odd, they quite frankly terrify me."

Yes; that was a sample of the reaction he might expect where the Sharpes were concerned. Ben Carley had gone out of his way today to let him know that, if there was police trouble at The Franchise, he wouldn't be able to count on an unprejudiced jury. He must take measures for the protection of the Sharpes. When he saw them on Friday he would suggest a private investigation by a paid agent. The police were overworked—had been overworked for a decade and more—and there was just a chance that one man working at his leisure on one trail might be more successful than the orthodox and official investigation had been.

 $B_{
m ut}$ by Friday morning it was too late to take measures for the safety of The Franchise.

Robert had reckoned with the diligence of the police; he had reckoned with the slow spread of whispers; but he had reckoned without the *Ack-Emma*.

The *Ack-Emma* was the latest representative of the tabloid newspaper to enter British journalism from the West. It was run on the principle that two thousand pounds for damages is a cheap price to pay for sales worth half a million. It had blacker headlines, more sensational pictures, and more indiscreet letterpress than any paper printed so far by British presses. Fleet Street had its own name for it—monosyllabic and unprintable—but no protection against it. The press had always been its own censor, deciding what was and what was not permissible by the principles of its own good sense and good taste. If a "rogue" publication decided not to conform to those principles then there was no power that could make it conform. In ten years the *Ack-Emma* had passed by half a million the daily net sales of the best selling newspaper in the country to date. In any suburban railway carriage seven out of ten people bound for work in the morning were reading an *Ack-Emma*.

And it was the Ack-Emma that blew the Franchise affair wide open.

Robert had been out early into the country on that Friday morning to see an old woman who was dying and wanted to alter her will. This was a performance she repeated on an average once every three months and her doctor made no secret of the fact that in his opinion she "would blow out a hundred candles one day without a second puff." But of course a lawyer cannot tell a client who summons him urgently at eight-thirty in the morning not to be silly. So Robert had taken some new will forms, fetched his car from the garage, and driven into the country. In spite of his usual tussle with the old tyrant among the pillows—who could never be brought to understand the elementary fact that you cannot give away *four* shares amounting to one third each—he enjoyed the spring countryside. And he hummed to himself on the way home, looking forward to seeing Marion Sharpe in less than an hour.

He had decided to forgive her for liking Nevil. After all, Nevil had never tried to palm her off on Carley. One must be fair.

He ran the car into the garage, under the noses of the morning lot going out from the livery stable, parked it, and then, remembering that it was past the first of the month, strolled over to the office to pay his bill to Brough, who ran the office side. But it was Stanley who was in the office; thumbing over dockets and invoices with the strong hands that so surprisingly finished off his thin forearms.

"When I was in the Signals," Stanley said, casting him an absent-minded glance, "I used to believe that the Quarter-bloke was a crook, but now I'm not so sure."

"Something missing?" said Robert. "I just looked in to pay my bill. Bill usually has it ready."

"I expect it's somewhere around," Stanley said, still thumbing. "Have a look."

Robert, used to the ways of the office, picked up the loose papers discarded by Stanley, so as to come on the normal tidy strata of Bill's arrangement below. As he lifted the untidy pile he uncovered a girl's face; a newspaper picture of a girl's face. He did not recognise it at once but it reminded him of someone and he paused to look at it.

"Got it!" said Stanley in triumph, extracting a sheet of paper from a clip. He swept the remaining loose papers on the desk into a pile and so laid bare to Robert's gaze the whole front page of that morning's Ack-Emma.

Cold with shock, Robert stared at it.

Stanley, turning to take the papers he was holding from his grasp, noticed his absorption and approved it.

"Nice little number, that," he said. "Reminds me of a bint I had in Egypt. Same far-apart eyes. Nice kid she was. Told the most original lies."

He went back to his paper-arranging, and Robert went on staring.

THIS IS THE GIRL

said the paper in enormous black letters across the top of the page; and below it, occupying two-thirds of the page, was the girl's photograph. And then, in smaller but still obtrusive type, below:

IS THIS THE HOUSE?

and below it a photograph of The Franchise.

Across the bottom of the page was the legend:

THE GIRL SAYS YES: WHAT DO THE POLICE SAY?

See inside for the story.

He put out his hand and turned over the page. Yes; it was all there, except for the Sharpes' name. He dropped the page, and looked again at that shocking frontispiece. Yesterday The Franchise was a house protected by four high walls; so unobtrusive, so sufficient unto itself, that even Milford did not know what it looked like. Now it was there to be stared at on every bookstall; on every news-agent's counter from Penzance to Pentland. Its flat, forbidding front a foil for the innocence of the face above it.

The girl's photograph was a head-and-shoulders affair, and appeared to be a studio portrait. Her hair had an arranged-for-an-occasion look, and she was wearing what looked like a party frock. Without her school coat she looked—not less innocent, nor older; no. He sought for the word that would express it. She looked less—tabu, was it? The school coat had stopped one thinking of her as a woman, just as a nun's habit would. A whole treatise could probably be written, now he came to think of it, on the protective quality of school coats. Protective in both senses: armour and camouflage. Now that the coat was no longer there, she was feminine instead of merely female.

But it was still a pathetically young face, immature and appealing. The candid brow, the wide-set eyes, the bee-stung lip that gave her mouth the expression of a disappointed child—it made a formidable whole. It would not be only the Bishop of Larborough who would believe a story told by that face.

"May I borrow this paper?" he asked Stanley.

"Take it," Stanley said. "We had it for our elevenses. There's nothing in it."

Robert was surprised. "Didn't you find this interesting?" he asked, indicating the front page.

Stanley cast a glance at the pictured face. "Not except that she reminded me of that bint in Egypt, lies and all."

"So you didn't believe that story she told?"

"What do you think!" Stanley said, contemptuous.

"Where do you think the girl was, then, all that time?"

"If I remember what I *think* I remember about the Red Sea Sadie, I'd say very definitely—oh, but definitely—on the tiles," Stanley said, and went out to attend to a customer.

Robert picked up the paper and went soberly away. At least one man-in-the-street had not believed the story; but that seemed to be due as much to an old memory as to present cynicism.

And although Stanley had quite obviously read the story without reading the name of the characters concerned, or even the place-names, only ten per cent of readers did that (according to the best Mass Observation); the other ninety per cent would have read every word, and would now be discussing the affair with varying degrees of relish.

At his own office he found that Hallam had been trying to reach him by telephone.

"Shut the door and come in, will you," he said to old Mr. Heseltine, who had caught him with the news on his arrival and was now standing in the door of his room. "And have a look at that."

He reached for the receiver with one hand, and laid the paper under Mr. Heseltine's nose with the other.

The old man touched it with his small-boned fastidious hand, as one seeing a strange exhibit for the first time. "This is the publication one hears so much about," he said. And gave his attention to it, as he would to any strange document.

"We are both in a spot, aren't we!" Hallam said, when they were connected. And raked his vocabulary for some epithets suitable to the *Ack-Emma*." As if the police hadn't enough to do without having that rag on their tails!" he finished, being naturally absorbed in the police point of view.

"Have you heard from the Yard?"

"Grant was burning the wires at nine this morning. But there's nothing they can do. Just grin and bear it. The police are always fair game. Nothing you can do, either, if it comes to that."

"Not a thing," Robert said. "We have a fine free press."

Hallam said a few more things about the press. "Do your people know?" he asked.

"I shouldn't think so. I'm quite sure they would never normally see the *Ack-Emma*, and there hasn't been time for some kind soul to send it to them. But they are due here in about ten minutes, and I'll show it to them then."

"If it was ever possible for me to be sorry for that old battle-axe," Hallam said, "it would be at this minute."

"How did the Ack-Emma get the story? I thought the parents—the girl's guardians, I mean—were very strongly against that kind of publicity."

"Grant says the girl's brother went off the deep end about the police taking no action and went to the *Ack-Emma* off his own bat. They are strong on the champion act. 'The *Ack-Emma* will see right done!' I once knew one of their crusades run into a third day."

When he hung up Robert thought that if it was a bad break for both sides, it was at least an even break. The police would without doubt redouble their efforts to find corroborative evidence; on the other hand the publication of the girl's photograph meant for the Sharpes a faint hope that somebody, somewhere, would recognise it and say: "This girl could not have been in The Franchise on the date in question because she was at such-and-such a place."

"A shocking story, Mr. Robert," Mr. Heseltine said. "And if I may say so a quite shocking publication. Most offensive."

"That house," Robert said, "is The Franchise, where old Mrs. Sharpe and her daughter live; and where I went the other day, if you remember, to give them some legal advice."

"You mean that these people are our clients?"

"Yes."

"But, Mr. Robert, that is not at all in our line." Robert winced at the dismay in his voice. "That is quite outside our usual—indeed quite beyond our normal—we are not competent—"

"We are competent, I hope, to defend any client against a publication like the Ack-Emma" Robert said, coldly.

Mr. Heseltine eyed the screaming rag on the table. He was obviously facing the difficult choice between a criminal clientèle and a disgraceful journal.

"Did you believe the girl's story when you read it?" Robert asked.

"I don't see how she could have made it up," Mr. Heseltine said simply. "It is such a very circumstantial story, isn't it?"

"It is, indeed. But I saw the girl when she was brought to The Franchise to identify it last week—that was the day I went out so hurriedly just after tea—and I don't believe a word she says. Not a word," he added, glad to be able to say it loudly and distinctly to himself and to be sure at last that he believed it.

"But how could she have thought of The Franchise at all, or known all those things, if she wasn't there?"

"I don't know. I haven't the least idea."

"It is a most unlikely place to pick on, surely; a remote, invisible house like that, on a lonely road, in country that people don't visit very much."

"I know. I don't know how the job was worked, but that is a job I am certain. It is a choice not between stories, but between human beings. I am quite certain that the two Sharpes are incapable of insane conduct like that. Whereas I don't believe the girl incapable of telling a story like that. That is what it amounts to." He paused a moment. "And you'll just have to trust my judgment about it, Timmy," he added, using his childhood's name for the old clerk.

Whether it was the "Timmy" or the argument, it was apparent that Mr. Heseltine had no further protest to make.

"You'll be able to see the criminals for yourself," Robert said, "because I heard their voices in the hall now. You might bring them in, will you."

Mr. Heseltine went dumbly out on his mission, and Robert turned the newspaper over so that the comparatively innocuous GIRL SMUGGLED ABOARD was all that would meet the visitors' eye.

Mrs. Sharpe, moved by some belated instinct for convention, had donned a hat in honour of the occasion. It was a flattish affair of black satin, and the general effect was that of a doctor of learning. That the effect had not been wasted was obvious by the relieved look on Mr. Heseltine's face. This was quite obviously not the kind of client he had expected; it was, on the other hand, the kind of client he was used to.

"Don't go away," Robert said to him, as he greeted the visitors; and to the others: "I want you to meet the oldest member of the firm, Mr. Heseltine."

It suited Mrs. Sharpe to be gracious; and exceedingly Victoria Regina was old Mrs. Sharpe when she was being gracious. Mr. Heseltine was more than relieved; he capitulated. Robert's first battle was over.

When they were alone Robert noticed that Marion had been waiting to say something.

"An odd thing happened this morning," she said. "We went to the Ann Boleyn place to have coffee—we quite often do—and there were two vacant tables, but when Miss Truelove saw us coming she very hastily tilted the chairs against the tables and said they were reserved. I might have believed her if she hadn't looked so embarrassed. You don't think that rumour has begun to get busy already, do you? That she did that because she has heard some gossip?"

"No," Robert said, sadly, "because she has read this morning's Ack-Emma." He turned the newspaper front side up. "I am sorry to have such bad news for you. You'll just have to shut your teeth and take it as small boys say. I don't suppose you have ever seen this poisonous rag at close quarters. It's a pity that the acquaintance should begin on so personal a basis."

"Oh, no!" Marion said, in passionate protest as her eye fell on the picture of The Franchise.

And then there was unbroken silence while the two women absorbed the contents of the inner page.

"I take it," Mrs. Sharpe said at last, "that we have no redress against this sort of thing?"

"None," Robert said. "All the statements are perfectly true. And it is all statement and not comment. Even if it were comment—and I've no doubt the comment will come—there has been no charge so the case is not *sub judice*. They are free to comment if they please."

"The whole thing is one huge implied comment," Marion said. "That the police failed to do their duty. What do they think we did? Bribed them?"

"I think the suggestion is that the humble victim has less pull with the police than the wicked rich."

"Rich," repeated Marion, her voice curdling with bitterness.

"Anyone who has more than six chimneys is rich. Now. If you are not too shocked to think, consider. We *know* that the girl was never at The Franchise, that she could not—" But Marion interrupted him.

"Do you know it?" she asked.

"Yes," Robert said.

Her challenging eyes lost their challenge, and her glance dropped.

"Thank you," she said quietly.

"If the girl was never there, how could she have seen the house! . . . She did see it somehow. It is too unlikely for belief that she could be merely repeating a description that someone else gave her How could she see it? Naturally, I mean."

"You could see it, I suppose, from the top deck of a bus," Marion said. "But there are no double-decker buses on the Milford route. Or from the top of a load of hay. But it is the wrong time of year for hay."

"It may be the wrong time for hay," croaked Mrs. Sharpe, "but there is no season for lorry-loads. I have seen lorries loaded with goods as high as any hay wagon."

"Yes," Marion said. "Suppose the lift the girl got was not in a car, but on a lorry."

"There is only one thing against that. If a girl was given a lift on a lorry she would be in the cabin, even if it meant sitting on someone's knee. They wouldn't perch her up on top of the load. Especially as it was a rainy evening, you may remember No one ever came to The Franchise to ask the way, or to sell something, or to mend something—someone that the girl could have been with, even in the background?"

But no; they were both sure that no one had come, within the time the girl had been on holiday.

"Then we take it for granted that what she learned about The Franchise she learned from being high enough on one occasion to see over the wall. We shall probably never know when or how, and we probably could not prove it if we did know. So our whole efforts will have to be devoted, not to proving that she wasn't at The Franchise, but that she was somewhere else!"

"And what chance is there of that?" Mrs. Sharpe asked.

"A better chance than before this was published," Robert said, indicating the front page of the *Ack-Emma*. "Indeed it is the one bright spot in the bad business. *We* could not have published the girl's photograph in the hope of information about her whereabouts during that month. But now that *they* have published it—her own people, I mean—the same benefit should come to us. They have broadcast the story—and that is our bad luck; but they have also broadcast the photograph—and if we have any good luck at all someone, somewhere, will observe that the story and the photograph do not fit. That at the material time, given in the story, the subject of the photograph could not possibly have been in the stated place, because they, personally, know her to have been elsewhere."

Marion's face lost a little of its bleak look, and even Mrs. Sharpe's thin back looked less rigid. What had seemed a disaster might be, after all, the means of their salvation.

"And what can we do in the way of private investigation?" Mrs. Sharpe asked. "You realise, I expect, that we have very little money; and I take it that a private inquiry is a spend-thrift business."

"It does usually run away with more than one had bargained for, because it is difficult to budget for. But to begin with I am going, myself, to see the various people involved, and find out, if possible, on what lines any inquiry should be based. Find out what she was *likely* to do."

"Will they tell you that?"

"Oh, no. They are probably unaware themselves of her tendencies. But if they talk about her at all a picture must emerge. At least I hope so."

There was a few moments' silence.

"You are extraordinarily kind, Mr. Blair."

Victoria Regina had come back to Mrs. Sharpe's manner, but there was a hint of something else. Almost of surprise; as if kindness was not one of the things she had normally met with in life; nor expected. Her stiffly gracious acknowledgement was as eloquent as if she had said: "You know that we are poor, and that we may never be able to pay you adequately, and we are not at all the kind of people that you would choose to represent, but you are going out of your way to do us the best service in your power, and we are grateful."

"When do you go?" Marion asked.

"Directly after lunch."

"Today!"

"The sooner the better."

"Then we won't keep you," Mrs. Sharpe said, rising. She stood for a moment looking down at the paper where it lay spread on the table. "We enjoyed the privacy of The Franchise a great deal," she said.

When he had seen them out of the door and into their car, he called Nevil into his room and picked up the receiver to talk to Aunt Lin about packing a bag.

"I suppose you don't see the Ack-Emma ever?" he asked Nevil.

"I take it that the question is rhetoric," Nevil said.

"Have a look at this morning's. Hullo, Aunt Lin?"

"Does someone want to sue them for something? It will be sound money for us, if so. They practically always settle out of court. They have a special fund for the—" Nevil's voice died away. He had seen the front page that was staring up at him from the table.

Robert stole a look at him over the telephone, and observed with satisfaction the naked shock on his cousin's bright young features. The youth of today, he understood, considered themselves shock-proof; it was good to know that, faced with an ordinary slab of real life, they reacted like any other human being.

"Be an angel, Aunt Lin, and pack a bag for me, will you? Just for overnight. . . . "

Nevil had torn the paper open and was now reading the story.

"Just London and back, I expect but I'm not sure. Anyhow, just the little case; and just the minimum. Not all the things I might need, if you love me. Last time there was a bottle of digestive powder weighing nearly a pound and when in heck did I ever need a digestive powder! . . . All right then I will have ulcers. . . . Yes, I'll be in to lunch in about ten minutes."

"The blasted swine!" said the poet and intellectual, falling back in his need on the vernacular.

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"Make of it! Of what?"

"The girl's story."

"Does one have to make anything of it? An obvious piece of sensationalism by an unbalanced adolescent?"

"And if I told you that the said adolescent is a very calm, ordinary, well-spoken-of school-girl who is anything but sensational?"

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes. That is why I first went to The Franchise last week, to be there when Scotland Yard brought the girl to confront them." Put that in your pipe and smoke it, young Nevil. She may talk hens and Maupassant with you, but it is me she turns to in trouble.

"To be there on their behalf?"

"Certainly."

Nevil relaxed suddenly. "Oh, well; that's all right. For a moment I thought you were against her. Against them. But that's all right. We can join forces to put a spoke in the wheel of this—" He flicked the paper—"this moppet." Robert laughed at this typically Nevil choice of epithet. "What are you going to do about it, Robert?"

Robert told him. "And you will hold the fort while I am gone." He saw that Nevil's attention had gone back to the "moppet."

He moved over to join him and together they considered the young face looking so calmly up at them. "An attractive face, on the whole," Robert said. "What do you make of it?" "What I should *like* to make of it," said the aesthete, with slow venom, "would be a *very nasty mess.*"

The Wynns' home outside Aylesbury was in a countrified suburb; the kind of district where rows of semi-detached houses creep along the edge of the still unspoiled fields; self-conscious and aware that they are intruders, or smug and not caring, according to the character their builders have given them. The Wynns lived in one of the apologetic rows; a redbrick string of ramshackle dwellings that set Robert's teeth on edge; so raw they were, so crude, so hang-dog. But as he drove slowly up the road, looking for the appropriate number, he was won over by the love that had gone to the decoration of these regrettable objects. No love had gone to their building; only a reckoning. But to each owner, as he took over, the bare little house had represented his "sufficient beauty," and having found it he served it. The gardens were small miracles of loveliness; each succeeding one a fresh revelation of some unsuspected poet's heart.

Nevil really ought to be here to see, Robert thought, slowing down yet once more as a new perfection caught his eye; there was more poetry here than in a whole twelve months of his beloved *Watchman*. All his clichés were here: form, rhythm, colour, total gesture, design, impact . . .

Or would Nevil see only a row of suburban gardens? Only Meadowside Lane, Aylesbury, with some Woolworth plants in the gardens?

Probably.

Number 39 was the one with the plain green grass bordered by a rockery. It was also distinguished by the fact that its curtains were invisible. No genteel net was stretched across the window-pane, no cream casement cloth hung at the sides. The windows were bare to the sun, the air, and the human gaze. This surprised Robert as much as it probably surprised the neighbours. It augured a nonconformity that he had not expected.

He rang the bell, wishing that he did not feel like a bagman. He was a suppliant; and that was a new role for Robert Blair.

Mrs. Wynn surprised him even more than her windows did. It was only when he had met her that he realised how complete a picture he had built in his mind of the woman who had adopted and mothered the child Betty Kane: the grey hair, the solid matronly comfortable figure, the plain broad sensible face; perhaps, even, an apron, or one of those flowered overalls that housewives wear. But Mrs. Wynn was not at all like that. She was slight and neat and young and modern and dark and pink-cheeked and still pretty, and had a pair of the most intelligent bright brown eyes Robert had ever seen.

When she saw a stranger she looked defensive, and made an involuntary closing movement with the door she was holding; but a second glance seemed to reassure her. Robert explained who he was, and she listened without interrupting him in a way he found quite admirable. Very few of his own clients listened without interrupting; male or female.

"You are under no obligation to talk to me," he finished, having explained his presence. "But I hope very much that you won't refuse. I have told Inspector Grant that I was going to see you this afternoon, on my clients' behalf."

"Oh, if the police know about it and don't mind—" She stepped back to let him come past her. "I expect you have to do your best for those people if you are their lawyer. And we have nothing to hide. But if it is really Betty you want to interview I'm afraid you can't. We have sent her into the country to friends for the day, to avoid all the fuss. Leslie meant well, but it was a stupid thing to do."

"Leslie?

"My son. Sit down, won't you." She offered him one of the easy chairs in a pleasant, uncluttered sitting-room. "He was too angry about the police to think clearly—angry about their failure to do anything when it seemed so proved, I mean. He has always been devoted to Betty. Indeed until he got engaged they were inseparable."

Robert's ears pricked. This was the kind of thing he had come to hear.

"Engaged?"

"Yes. He got engaged just after the New Year to a very nice girl. We are all delighted."

"Was Betty delighted?"

"She wasn't jealous, if that is what you mean," she said, looking at him with her intelligent eyes. "I expect she missed not coming first with him as she used to, but she was very nice about it. She is a nice girl, Mr. Blair. Believe me. I was a schoolmistress before I married—not a very good one, that is why I got married at the first opportunity—and I know a lot about girls. Betty has never given me a moment's anxiety."

"Yes, I know. Everyone reports excellently of her. Is your son's fiancée a school fellow of hers?"

"No, she is a stranger. Her people have come to live near here and he met her at a dance."

"Does Betty go to dances?"

"Not grown-up dances. She is too young yet."

"So she has not met the fiancée?"

"To be honest, none of us had. He rather sprang her on us. But we liked her so much we didn't mind."

"He must be very young to be settling down?"

"Oh, the whole thing is absurd, of course. He is twenty and she is eighteen. But they are very sweet together. And I was very young myself when I married and I have been very happy. The only thing I lacked was a daughter, and Betty filled that gap."

"What does she want to do when she leaves school?"

"She doesn't know. She has no special talent for anything as far as I can see. I have a notion that she will marry early."

"Because of her attractiveness?"

"No, because—" she paused and apparently changed what she had been going to say. "Girls who have no particular bent fall easily into matrimony."

He wondered if what she had been going to say had any remote connection with slate-blue eyes.

"When Betty failed to turn up in time to go back to school, you thought she was just playing truant? Although she was a well-behaved child."

"Yes, she was growing bored with school; and she had always said—which is quite true—that the first day back at school is a wasted one. So we thought she was just 'taking adventure' for once, as they say. 'Trying it on' as Leslie said, when he heard that she hadn't turned up."

"I see. Was she wearing school clothes on her holiday?"

For the first time Mrs. Wynn looked doubtfully at him; uncertain of his motive in asking.

"No. No, she was wearing her week-end clothes. . . . You know that when she came back she was wearing only a frock and shoes?"

Robert nodded.

"I find it difficult to imagine women so depraved that they would treat a helpless child like that."

"If you could meet the women, Mrs. Wynn, you would find it still more difficult to imagine."

"But all the worst criminals look innocent and harmless, don't they?"

Robert let that pass. He wanted to know about the bruises on the girl's body. Were they fresh bruises?

"Oh, quite fresh. Most of them had not begun to 'turn' even."

This surprised Robert a little.

"But there were older bruises as well, I take it."

"If there were they had faded so much as to be unnoticeable among all the bad new ones."

"What did the new ones look like? A whipping?"

"Oh, no. She had actually been knocked about. Even her poor little face. One jaw was swollen, and there was a big bruise on the other temple."

"The police say that she grew hysterical when it was suggested that she should tell them her story."

"That was when she was still ill. Once we had got the story out of her and she had a long rest it was easy enough to persuade her to repeat it to the police."

"I know you will answer this frankly, Mrs. Wynn: Has there never been any suspicion in your mind that Betty's story might not be true? Even a momentary suspicion?"

"Not even a momentary one. Why should there be? She has always been a truthful child. Even if she hadn't, how could she invent a long circumstantial story like that without being found out? The police asked her all the questions they wanted to; there was never any suggestion of accepting her statement as it stood."

"When she first told her story to you, did she tell it all in a piece?"

"Oh, no; it was spread over a day or two. The outline, first. And then filling in the details as she remembered them. Things like the window in the attic being round."

"Her days of coma had not blurred her memory."

"I don't think they would in any case. I mean, with Betty's kind of brain. She has a photographic memory."

Has she indeed! thought Robert; both ears erect and wide open.

"Even as a small child she could look at the page of a book—a child's book, of course—and repeat most of the contents from the picture in her mind. And when we played the Kim game—you know? the objects on the tray—we had to put Betty out of the game because she invariably won. Oh, no, she would remember what she saw."

Well, there was another game in which the cry was "Growing warm!" Robert remembered.

"You say she was always a truthful child—and everyone supports you in that—but did she never indulge in romanticising her own life, as children sometimes do?"

"Never," said Mrs. Wynn firmly. The idea seemed faintly to amuse her. "She couldn't," she added. "Unless it was the real thing it was no use to Betty. Even playing dolls' tea-parties, she would never imagine the things on the plates as most children are quite happy to do; there had to be a real thing there, even if it was only a little cube of bread. Usually it was something nicer, of course; it was a good way to wangle an extra and she was always a little greedy."

Robert admired the detachment with which she considered her longed-for and much-loved daughter. The remains of a schoolmistress's cynicism? So much more valuable, anyhow, for a child than a blind love. It was a pity that her intelligence and devotion had been so ill-rewarded.

"I don't want to keep on at a subject that must be unpleasant for you," Robert said. "But perhaps you could tell me something about the parents."

"Her parents?" Mrs. Wynn asked, surprised.

"Yes. Did you know them well? What were they like?"

"We didn't know them at all. We never even saw them."

"But you had Betty for—what was it?—nine months?—before her parents were killed, hadn't you?"

"Yes, but her mother wrote shortly after Betty came to us and said that to come to see her would only upset the child and make her unhappy and that the best thing for everyone would be to leave her to us until such times as she could go back to London. She said would I talk to Betty about her at least once every day."

Robert's heart contracted with pity for this unknown dead woman who had been willing to tear her own heart out for her only child. What treasure of love and care had been poured out in front of Betty Kane, child evacuee.

"Did she settle down easily when she came? Or did she cry for her mother?"

"She cried because she didn't like the food. I don't remember her ever crying for her mother. She fell in love with Leslie the first night—she was just a baby, you know—and I think her interest in him blotted out any grief she might have felt. And he, being four years older, was just the right age to feel protective. He still does—that is why we are in this mess today."

"How did this Ack-Emma affair happen? I know it was your son who went to the paper, but did you eventually come round to

"Good heavens, no," Mrs. Wynn said indignantly. "It was all over before we could do anything about it. My husband and I were out when Leslie and the reporter came—they sent a man back with him and when they heard his story, to get it first-hand from Betty-and when-"

"And Betty gave it quite willingly?"

"I don't know how willingly. I wasn't there. My husband and I knew nothing about it until this morning, when Leslie laid an Ack-Emma under our noses. A little defiantly, I may add. He is not feeling too good about it now that it is done. The Ack-Emma, I should like to assure you, Mr. Blair, is not normally my son's choice. If he had not been worked up-

"I know. I know exactly how it happened. And that tell-us-your-troubles-and-we'll-see-right-done is very insidious stuff." He rose. "You have been very kind indeed, Mrs. Wynn, and I am exceedingly grateful to you."

His tone was evidently more heartfelt than she had expected and she looked doubtfully at him. What have I said to help you? she seemed to be asking, half-dismayed.

He asked where Betty's parents had lived in London, and she told him. "There is nothing there now," she added. "Just the open space. It is to be part of some new building scheme, so they have done nothing to it so far."

On the doorstep he ran into Leslie.

Leslie was an extraordinarily good-looking young man who seemed to be entirely unaware of the fact—a trait that endeared him to Robert, who was in no mood to look kindly on him. Robert had pictured him as the bull-in-a-china-shop type; but on the contrary he was a rather delicate, kind-looking boy with shy earnest eyes and untidy soft hair. He glared at Robert with frank enmity when his mother presented him and had explained his business there; but, as his mother had said, there was a shade of defiance in the glare; Leslie was obviously not very happy with his own conscience this evening.

"No one is going to beat my sister and get away with it," he said fiercely when Robert had mildly deplored his action.
"I sympathise with your point of view," Robert said, "but I personally would rather be beaten nightly for a fortnight than have my photograph on the front page of the Ack-Emma. Especially if I was a young girl."

"If you had been beaten every night for a fortnight and no one did anything about it you might be very glad to have your photograph published in any rag if it got you justice," Leslie observed pertinently and brushed past them into the house.

Mrs. Wynn turned to Robert with a small apologetic smile, and Robert, taking advantage of her softened moment, said: "Mrs. Wynn, if it ever occurs to you that anything in that story of Betty's does not ring true, I hope you won't decide that sleeping dogs are best left."

"Don't pin your faith to that hope, Mr. Blair."

"You would let sleeping dogs lie, and the innocent suffer?"

"Oh no; I didn't mean that. I meant the hope of my doubting Betty's story. If I believed her at the beginning I am not likely to doubt her later."

"One never knows. Someday it may occur to you that this or that does not 'fit.' You have a naturally analytic mind; it may present you with a piece of subconscious when you least expect it. Something that has puzzled you deep down may refuse to be pushed down any more."

She had walked to the gate with him, and as he spoke the last sentence he turned to take farewell of her. To his surprise something moved behind her eyes at that light remark of his.

So she wasn't certain after all.

Somewhere, in the story, in the circumstances, there was some small thing that left a question in that sober analytical mind of

What was it?

And then, with what he always remembered afterwards as the only perfect sample of telepathic communication in his experience, he paused as he was stepping into his car, and said: "Had she anything in her pockets when she came home?"

'She had only one pocket; the one in her dress."

"And was there anything in it?"

There was the faintest tightening of the muscles round her mouth. "Just a lipstick," she said, evenly.

"A lipstick! She is a little young for that, isn't she?"

"My dear Mr. Blair, they start experimenting with lipstick at the age of ten. As a wet-day amusement it has taken the place of dresssing-up in Mother's things."

"Yes, probably; Woolworth is a great benefactor."

She smiled and said goodbye and moved towards the house as he drove away.

What puzzled her about the lipstick? Robert wondered, as he turned from the uneven surface of Meadowside Lane on to the black smooth surface of the main Aylesbury-London road. Was it just the fact that the fiends at The Franchise should have left it with the girl? Was that what she found odd?

How amazing that the worry in her subconscious mind had communicated itself so instantly to him. He had not known that he was going to say that sentence about the girl's pockets until he heard himself saying it. It would never have occurred to him, left to himself, to wonder what was in the pocket of her frock. It would not occur to him that the frock might have a pocket at

So there was a lipstick.

And its presence was something that puzzled Mrs. Wynn.

Well; that was a straw that could be added to the little heap he had collected. To the fact that the girl had a photographic memory. To the fact that her nose had been put out of joint without warning only a month or two ago. To the fact that she was greedy. To the fact that she was bored with school. To the fact that she liked "reality."

To the fact—above all—that no one in that household, not even detached sensible Mrs. Wynn, knew what went on in Betty Kane's mind. It was quite unbelievable that a girl of fifteen who had been the centre of a young man's world could see herself supplanted overnight without reacting violently to the situation. But Betty had been "very nice about it."

Robert found this heartening. It was proof that that candid young face was no guide at all to the person who was Betty Kane.

Robert had decided to kill a great many birds with one stone by spending the night in London.

To begin with, he wanted to have his hand held. And in the circumstances no one would hold his hand to better purpose than his old school friend Kevin Macdermott. What Kevin did not know about crime was probably not so anyhow. And as a well-known defending counsel his knowledge of human nature was extensive, varied, and peculiar.

At the moment the betting was evens whether Macdermott would die of high blood-pressure before he was sixty, or grace the Woolsack when he was seventy. Robert hoped the latter. He was very fond of Kevin.

They had first gravitated towards each other at school because they were both "going in for Law," but they had become and remained friends because they were complementary. To the Irishman, Robert's equanimity was amusing, provocative, and—when he was tired—restful. To Robert, Kevin's Celt flamboyance was exotic and fascinating. It was typical that Robert's ambition was to go back to the little country town and continue life as it was; while Kevin's was to alter everything that was alterable in the Law and to make as much noise as possible in the doing of it.

So far Kevin had not altered much—though he had done his best where some judges' rulings were concerned—but he had made considerable noise in his effortless, slightly malicious, fashion. Already the presence of Kevin Macdermott in a case added fifty percent to its newspaper value—and a good deal more than that to its cost.

He had married—advantageously but happily—had a pleasant house near Weybridge and three hardy sons, lean and dark and lively like their father. For town purposes he kept a small flat in St. Paul's Churchyard, where, as he pointed out, he "could afford to look down on Queen Anne." And whenever Robert was in town—which was not oftener than Robert could help—they dined together, either at the flat or at the latest place where Kevin had found good claret. Outside the Law, Kevin's interests were show hacks, claret, and the livelier films of Warner Brothers.

Kevin was to be at some Bar dinner tonight so his secretary had said when Robert had tried to reach him from Milford; but he would be delighted to have a legitimate excuse for dodging the speeches, so would Robert go along to St. Paul's Churchyard after dinner, and wait for him.

That was a good thing: if Kevin came from a dinner he would be relaxed and prepared to settle down for the evening; not restless and with three-quarters of his mind still back in the courtroom as he sometimes was.

Meanwhile, he would ring up Grant at Scotland Yard and see if he could spare him some minutes tomorrow morning. He must get it clear in his mind how he stood in relation with Scotland Yard: fellow sufferers, but on opposite sides of the fence.

At the Fortescue, the Edwardian old place in Jermyn Street, where he had stayed ever since he was first allowed to go to London on his own, they greeted him like a nephew and gave him "the room he had last time"; a dim comfortable box with a shoulder-high bed and a buttoned-plush settee; and brought him up a tray on which reposed an out-size brown kitchen teapot, a Georgian silver cream jug, about a pound of sugar lumps in a sixpenny glass dish, a Dresden cup with flowers and little castles, a red-and-gold Worcester plate made for "their Maj's" William IV and his Queen, and a much buckled kitchen knife with a stained brown handle.

Both the tea and the tray refreshed Robert. He went out into the evening streets feeling vaguely hopeful.

His search for the truth about Betty Kane brought him, only half consciously, to the vacant space where that block of flats had been; the spot where both her parents had died in one shattering burst of high explosive. It was a bare neat space, waiting its appointed part in some plan. Nothing was there to show that a building had ever stood on the spot. Round about, the unharmed houses stood with blank smug faces, like mentally deficient children too idiot to have understood the meaning of a disaster. It had passed them by and that was all they knew or cared about.

On the opposite side of the wide street, a row of small shops still stood as they had obviously stood for fifty years or more. Robert crossed to them and went into the tobacconist's to buy cigarettes; a tobacconist-and-newsagent knows everything.

"Were you here when that happened?" Robert asked, leaning his head towards the door.

"When what happened?" asked the rosy little man, so used to the blank space that he had long ago become unaware of it. "Oh, the incident? No, I was out on duty. Warden, I was."

Oh, yes; yes, certainly he had the business then, and for long before it. Brought up in the neighbourhood, he was, and succeeded his father in the business.

"You would know the local people well, then. Do you remember the couple who were caretakers of the block of flats, by any chance?"

"The Kanes? Of course I do. Why wouldn't I remember them? They were in and out of this place all day. He for his paper in the morning, and then her for her cigarettes shortly after, and then back for his evening paper and her back for the third time, probably for cigarettes again, and then he and I used to have a pint at the local when my boy had finished his lessons and would take over for me here. You knew them, sir?"

"No. But I met someone the other day who spoke of them. How was the whole place wrecked?"

The little pink man sucked his teeth with a derisive sound.

"Jerry-built. That's what it was. Just jerry-built. The bomb fell in the area there—that's how the Kanes were killed, and they were down in their basement feeling fairly safe—and the whole thing just settled down like a house of cards. Shocking." He

straightened the edge of a pile of evening papers. "It was just her bad luck that the only evening in weeks that she was at home with her husband, a bomb had to come." He seemed to find a sardonic pleasure in the thought.

"Where was she usually, then?" Robert asked. "Did she work somewhere in the evenings?"

"Work!" said the little man, with vast scorn. "Her!" And then, recollecting: "Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sure. I forgot for the minute that they might be friends of—"

Robert hastened to assure him that his interest in the Kanes was purely academic. Someone had remembered them as caretakers of the block of flats, that was all. If Mrs. Kane was not out working in the evenings what was she out doing?

"Having a good time, of course. Oh, yes, people managed to have a good time even then—if they wanted it enough and looked hard enough for it. Kane, he wanted her to go away to the country with that little girl of theirs, but would she? Not her! Three days of the country would kill her she said. She didn't even go to see the little thing when they evacuated her. The authorities, that is. With the rest of the children. It's my opinion she was tickled to death to have the child off her hands so that she could go dancing at nights."

"Whom did she go dancing with?"

"Officers," the little man said succinctly. "A lot more exciting than watching the grass grow. I don't say there was any actual harm in it, mind you," he said hastily. "She's dead, and I wouldn't like to pin anything on her that she isn't here to unpin, if you take my meaning. But she was a bad mother and a bad wife, that's flat and no one ever said anything to the contrary."

"Was she pretty?" Robert asked, thinking of the good emotion he had wasted on Betty's mother.

"In a sulky sort of way, yes. She sort of smouldered. You wondered what she would be like when she was lit up. Excited, I mean; not tight. I never saw her tight. She didn't get her excitement that way."

"And her husband?"

"Ah, he was all right, Bert Kane was. Deserved better luck than that woman. One of the best, Bert was. Terribly fond of the little girl. Spoiled her, of course. She had only to want something and he got it for her; but she was a nice kid, for all that. Demure. Butter wouldn't melt in her little mouth. Yes, Bert deserved better out of life than a goodtime wife and a cupboard-love kid. One of the best, Bert was. . . . " He looked over the roadway at the empty space, reflectively. "It took them the best part of a week to find him," he said.

Robert paid for his cigarettes and went out into the street both saddened and relieved. Sad for Bert Kane, who had deserved better; but glad that Betty Kane's mother was not the woman he had pictured. All the way to London his mind had grieved for that dead woman; the woman who had broken her heart for her child's good. It had seemed to him unbearable that the child she had so greatly loved should be Betty Kane. But now he was free of that grief. Betty Kane's mother was exactly the mother he would have chosen for her if he were God. And she on her part looked very like being her mother's daughter.

"A cupboard-love kid." Well, well. And what was it Mrs. Wynn had said? "She cried because she didn't like the food, but I don't remember her crying for her mother."

Nor for that father who so devotedly spoiled her, apparently.

When he got back to the hotel he took his copy of the *Ack-Emma* from his despatch case, and over his solitary dinner at the Fortescue considered at his leisure the story on Page Two. From its poster-simplicity opening—

"On a night in April a girl came back to her home clad in nothing but a frock and shoes. She had left home, a bright happy schoolgirl with not a . . . "

to its final fanfare of sobs, it was of its kind a small masterpiece. It did perfectly what it set out to do. And that was to appeal to the greatest number of readers with one and the same story. To those who wanted sex-interest it offered the girl's lack of clothes, to the sentimentalist her youth and charm, to the partisan her helpless condition, to the sadist the details of her beatings, to the sufferer from class-hatred a description of the big white house behind its high walls, and to the warm-hearted British public in general the impression that the police had been, if not "nobbled," then at least lax, and that Right had not been Done.

• • •

Yes. It was clever.

Of course the story was a gift for them—which is why they had sent a man back immediately with young Leslie Wynn. But Robert felt that, when really on their mettle, the *Ack-Emma* could probably make a good story of a broken connecting-rod.

It must be a dreary business catering exclusively for the human failings. He turned the pages over, observing how consistently each story was used to appeal to the regrettable in the reader. Even GAVE AWAY A MILLION, he noticed, was the story of a disgraceful old man unloading on his income-tax and not of a boy who had climbed out of a slum by his own courage and enterprise.

With a slight nausea he put the thing back in his case, and took the case with him to St. Paul's Churchyard. There he found the "daily" woman waiting for him with her hat on. Mr. Macdermott's secretary had telephoned to say that a friend of his was coming and that he was to be given the run of the house and left alone in it without scruple; she had stayed merely to let him in; she would now leave him to it; there was whisky on the little table by the fire, and there was another bottle in the cupboard, but it might, if you asked her, be wise not to remind Mr. Macdermott about it or he would stay up too late and she had great trouble getting him up in the morning.

"It's not the whisky," Blair said, smiling at her, "it's the Irish in him. All the Irish hate getting up."

This gave her pause on the doorstep; evidently struck by this new idea.

"I wouldn't wonder," she said. "My old man's the same, and he's Irish. It's not whisky with him, just original sin. At least that's what I always thought. But perhaps it's just his misfortune in being a Murphy."

It was a pleasant little place; warm and friendly, and peaceful now that the roar of the city traffic was still. He poured himself a drink, went to the window to look down on Queen Anne, paused a moment to note once more how lightly the great bulk of the church floated on its base; so proportioned, so balanced, that it looked as if one could take it up on a palm and dandle it there; and then sat down and, for the first time since he had gone out that morning to see a maddening old woman who was changing her will again, relaxed.

He was half asleep when he heard Kevin's key in the lock, and his host was in the room before he could move.

Macdermott tweaked his neck in an evil pinch as he passed behind him to the decanters on the table. "It's beginning, old boy," he said, "it's beginning."
"What is?" Robert asked.

"The thickening of that handsome neck of yours."

Robert rubbed his neck lazily where it stung. "I do begin to notice draughts on the back of it, now you come to mention it,"

"Christ, Robert! does nothing distress you," Kevin said, his eye pale and bright and mocking under their black brows, "even the imminent prospect of losing those good looks of yours?"

"I'm a little distressed at the moment but it isn't my looks."

"Well, what with Blair, Hayward, and Bennet it can't be bankruptcy; so I suppose it's a woman."

"Yes, but not the way you mean."

"Thinking of getting married? You ought to, Rob."

"You said that before."

"You want an heir for Blair, Hayward, and Bennet, don't you?" The calm certainty of Blair, Hayward, and Bennet had always pricked Kevin into small gibes, Robert remembered.

"There is no guarantee that it wouldn't be a girl. Anyhow, Nevil is taking care of that."

"The only thing that young woman of Nevil's will ever give birth to is a gramophone record. She was gracing a platform again the other day, I hear. If she had to earn the money for her train fares she mightn't be so willing to dash about the country being the Vocal Minority." He sat down with his drink. "I needn't ask if you are up on business. Sometime you really ought to come up and see this town. I suppose you dash off again tomorrow after a 10 a.m. interview with someone's solicitors."

"No," Robert said. "With Scotland Yard."

Kevin paused with his glass half-way to his mouth. "Robert you're slipping," he said. "What has the Yard to do with your Ivory Tower?"

"That's just it," Robert said equably, ignoring this additional flick at his Milford security. "It's there on the doorstep and I don't quite know how to deal with it. I want to listen to someone being intelligent about the situation. I don't know why I should unload it on you. You must be sick of problems. But you always did do my algebra for me."

"And you always reckoned the stocks and shares ones, if I remember rightly. I was always a fool about stocks. I still owe you something for saving me from a bad investment. Two bad investments," he added.

"Two?"

"Tamara, and Topeka Tin."

"I remember saving you from Topeka Tin, but I had nothing whatever to do with your breaking with Tamara."

"Oh, hadn't you, indeed! My good Robert, if you could have seen your face when I introduced you to her. Oh, no, not that way. Quite the contrary. The instantaneous kindness of your expression, that blasted English mask of courtesy and good breeding—it said everything. I saw myself going through life introducing Tamara to people and watching their faces being wellbred about it. It cured me of her in record time. I have never ceased to be grateful to you. So produce what is in the despatch case."

Nothing escaped Kevin, Robert thought, taking out his own copy of Betty Kane's statement to the police.

"This is a very short statement. I wish you would read it and tell me how it strikes you."

He wanted the impact on Kevin, without preliminaries to dull the edge of it.

Macdermott took it, read the first paragraph in one swift eye movement and said: "This is the Ack-Emma's protégée, I take

"I had no idea that you ever saw the Ack-Emma," Robert said, surprised.

"God love you, I feed on the Ack-Emma. No crime, no causes célèbres. No causes célèbres, no Kevin Macdermott. Or only a piece of him." He lapsed into utter silence. For four minutes his absorption was so complete that Robert felt alone in the room, as if his host had gone away. "Humph!" he said, coming out of it.

"Well?"

"I take it that your clients are the two women in the case, and not this girl?"

"Of course."

"Now you tell me your end," Kevin said, and listened.

Robert gave him the whole story. His reluctant visit, his growing partisanship as it became clear that it was a choice between Betty Kane and the two women, Scotland Yard's decision not to move on the available evidence, and Leslie Wynn's rash visit to the offices of the Ack-Emma.

"So tonight," Macdermott said, "the Yard is moving heaven and earth to find corroborative evidence that will back up the girl's story.'

"I suppose so," said Robert, depressed. "But what I want to know is: Do you or do you not believe the girl's story?"

"I never believe anyone's story," Kevin pointed out with gentle malice. "What you want to know is: Do I find the girl's story believable? And of course I do."

"You do!"

"I do. Why not?"

"But it's an absurd story," Robert said, more hotly than he had intended.

"There is nothing about it. Women who live lonely lives do insane things—especially if they are poor gentlewomen. Only the other day an elderly woman was found to have kept her sister chained up to a bed in a room no bigger than a good-sized cupboard. She had kept her like that for three years, and had fed her on the crusts and potato skins and the other scraps that she didn't want herself. She said, when it was discovered, that their money was going down too fast and this was her way of making ends meet. She had quite a good bank balance actually, but it was the fear induced by insecurity that had sent her crazy. That is a much more unbelievable—and from your point of view absurd—story than the girl's."

"Is it? It seems to me just an ordinary tale of insanity."

"Only because you know it happened. I mean, that someone had actually seen the thing. Suppose, on the contrary, that the rumour had merely gone round; that the crazy sister had heard it and released her victim before any investigation could be made; that the investigators found only two old ladies living an apparently normal life except for the invalidish nature of one of them. What then? Would you have believed the 'chained-up' tale? Or would you, more likely, have called it an 'absurd story'?"

Robert sank a little deeper into his depression.

"Here are two lonely and badly-dowered women saddled with a big house in the country; one of them too old to do much household work and the other loathing it. What is the most likely form for their mild insanity to take? The capture of a girl to be a servant to them, of course."

Damn. Kevin and his counsel's mind. He had thought that he had wanted Kevin's opinion, but what he had wanted was Kevin's backing for his own opinion.

"The girl they capture happens to be a blameless schoolgirl, conveniently far from her home. It is their bad luck that she is so blameless, because since she has never been caught out in a lie to date, everyone is going to take her word against theirs. If I were the police I would have risked it. It seems to me they are losing their nerve."

He shot an amused glance at Robert, sunk in his chair, glooming down his long legs at the fire. He sat for a moment or two enjoying his friend's discomfiture.

"Of course," he said, at length, "they may have remembered a parallel case, where everyone believed the girl's heart-rending story and were very thoroughly led up the garden."

"A parallel!" Robert said, folding his legs and sitting up. "When?"

"Seventeen-something. I forget the exact date."

"Oh," said Robert, dashed again.

"I don't know what is 'Oh' about it," Macdermott said mildly. "The nature of alibis has not changed much in two centuries." "Alibis?"

"If the parallel case is any guide the girl's story is an alibi."

"Then you believe—I mean you find it believable—that the girl's story is all nonsense?"

"A complete invention from beginning to end."

"Kevin, you are maddening. You said you found it believable."

"So I do. I also find it believable that it is a tissue of lies. I am not briefed for either side. I can make a very good case out for either, at the shortest notice. On the whole I should prefer to be counsel for the young woman from Aylesbury. She would be wonderful in the witness box, and from what you tell me neither of the Sharpes would be much help, visually, to a counsel."

He got up to help himself to more whisky, holding out his other hand for Robert's glass. But Robert was in no mood for conviviality. He shook his head without lifting his gaze from the fire. He was tired and beginning to be out of temper with Kevin. He had been wrong to come. When a man had been a counsel in the criminal courts as long as Kevin had, his mind had only points of view, not convictions any more. He would wait until Kevin had half-finished the glass he was now sitting down with, and then make a movement to go. It would be good to put his head on a pillow and forget for a little that he was responsible for other people's problems. Or rather, for the solution of them.

"I wonder what she was doing all that month," Kevin said conversationally, taking a large gulp of practically neat whisky.

Robert's mouth opened to say: "Then you do believe the girl is a fake!" but he stopped himself in time. He rebelled against dancing any more this evening to Kevin's piping.

"If you drink so much whisky on top of claret, what *you* will be doing for a month is a cure, my lad," he said. And to his surprise Kevin lay back and laughed like a schoolboy.

"Oh, Rob, I love you," he said delightedly. "You are the very essence of England. Everything we admire and envy in you. You sit there so mild, so polite, and let people bait you, until they conclude that you are an old tabby and they can do what they like with you, and then just when they are beginning to preen themselves they go that short step too far and wham! out comes that business-like paw with the glove off!" He picked Robert's glass out of his hand without a by-your-leave and rose to fill it and Robert let him. He was feeling better.

The London-Larborough road was a black straight ribbon in the sunshine, giving off diamond sparks as the crowded traffic caught the light and lost it again. Pretty soon both the air and the roads would be so full that no one could move in comfort and everyone would have to go back to the railways for quick travel. Progress, that was.

Kevin had pointed out last night that what with present ease of communications, it was quite on the cards that Betty Kane had spent her month's vacation in Sydney, N.S.W. It was a daunting thought. She could be anywhere from Kamchatka to Peru, and all he, Blair, had to do was a little thing like proving she wasn't in a house on the Larborough-Milford road. If it were not a sunny morning, and if he were not sorry for Scotland Yard, and if he didn't have Kevin to hold his hand, and if he were not doing pretty well on his own so far, he might have felt depressed.

Feeling sorry for Scotland Yard was the last thing he had anticipated. But sorry he was. All Scotland Yard's energies were devoted to proving the Sharpes guilty and Betty Kane's story true; for the very good reason that they believed the Sharpes to be guilty. But what each one of them ached in his private soul to do was to push Betty Kane down the *Ack-Emma's* throat; and they could only do that by proving her story nonsense. Yes, a really prize state of frustration existed in those large calm bodies at the Yard

Grant had been charming in his quiet reasonable way—it had been rather like going to see a doctor, now he came to think of it—and had quite willingly agreed that Robert should be told about any letters that the *Ack-Emma* might provoke.

"Don't pin your hopes too firmly to that, will you," he had said, in friendly warning. "For one letter that the Yard gets that has any worth it gets five thousand that are nonsense. Letter-writing is the natural outlet of the 'odds.' The busy-bodies, the idle, the perverted, the cranks, the feel-it-my-duties—"

"'Pro Bono Publico'—"

"Him and 'Civis'," Grant said with a smile. "Also the plain depraved. They all write letters. It's their *safe* outlet, you see. They can be as interfering, as long-winded, as obscene, as pompous, as one-idea'd, as they like on paper, and no one can kick them for it. So they write. My God, how they write!"

"But there is a chance—"

"Oh, yes. There is a chance. And all these letters will have to be weeded out however silly they are. Anything of importance will be passed on to you, I promise. But I do remind you that the ordinary intelligent citizen writes only one time in five thousand. He doesn't like what he thinks of as 'poking his nose in'—which is why he sits silent in a railway carriage and scandalises the Americans who still have a hick interest in other folk—and anyhow he's a busy man, full of his own affairs, and sitting down to a letter to the police about something that doesn't concern him is against all his instincts."

So Robert had come away pleased with the Yard, and sorry for them. At least he, Robert, had a straight row to hoe. He wouldn't be glancing aside every now and then and wishing it was the next row he was hoeing. And moreover he had Kevin's approval of the row he had chosen.

"I mean it," Kevin had said, "when I say that if I were the police I should almost have risked it. They have a good enough case. And a nice little conviction is always a hitch up the ladder of promotion for someone. Unfortunately—or fortunately for the citizen—the man who decides whether there is a case or not is the chap higher up, and he's not interested in any subordinate's speedy promotion. Amazing that wisdom should be the by-product of office procedure."

Robert, mellow with whisky, had let the cynicism flow past him.

"But let them just get one spot of corroboration, and they'll have a warrant at the door of The Franchise quicker than you can lift a telephone receiver."

"They won't get any corroboration," said the mellow Robert. "Why should they? How could they? What we want to do is to disprove the girl's story ourselves, so that it doesn't damn the Sharpes' lives for as long as they live. Once I have seen the aunt and uncle tomorrow we may have enough general knowledge about the girl to justify a start on our own investigation."

Now he was speeding down the black shining Larborough road on the way to seeing Betty's relations in Mainshill; the people she had stayed with on the memorable holiday. A Mr. and Mrs. Tilsit, they were. Tilsit, 93 Cherrill Street, Mainshill, Larborough—and the husband was travelling agent for a firm of brush-makers in Larborough and they had no children. That was all Robert knew about them.

He paused for a moment as he turned off the main road in Mainshill. This was the corner where Betty Kane waited for her bus. Or said she waited. Over there on the other side, it must have been. There was no side turning on that side; nothing but the long stretch of unbroken pavement as far as one could see in either direction. A busy enough road at this time of day; but empty enough, Robert supposed, in the doldrum hour of the late afternoon.

Cherrill Street was one long series of angular bay windows in dirty red brick, their forward surface almost scraping the low redbrick wall that hemmed them in from the pavement. The sour soil on either side of the window that did duty for a garden had none of the virtues of the new-turned earth of Meadowside Lane, Aylesbury; it grew only thin London Pride, weedy wall-flowers, and moth-eaten forget-me-not. The same housewife's pride obtained in Cherrill Street as in Aylesbury, of course, and the same crisp curtains hung at the windows; but if there were poets in Cherrill Street they found other outlets for their soul than gardens.

When he had rung unavailingly, and then knocked, at 93—indistinguishable from the others as far as he could see except by its painted numerals—a woman flung up the bedroom window next door, leaned out and said:

"You looking for Mrs. Tilsit?"

Robert said that he was.

- "She's gone to get her groceries. The shop at the corner."
- "Oh, thanks. If that's all, I'll wait."
- "Shouldn't wait if you want to see her soon. Should go and fetch her."
- "Oh. Is she going somewhere else?"
- "No, just the grocer's; it's the only shop round here. But she takes half a morning deciding between two brands of wheat flakes. You take one packet up right firm and put it in her bag and she'll be quite pleased."

Robert thanked her and began to walk away to the end of the street when she hailed him again.

- "Shouldn't leave your car. Take it with you."
- "But it's quite a little way, isn't it?"
- "Maybe, but it's Saturday."
- "Saturday?"
- "School's out."
- "Oh, I see. But there's nothing in it—" "to steal," he was going to say but amended it to "Nothing in it that's movable."
- "Movable! Huh! That's good. We had window-boxes once. Mrs. Laverty over the way had a gate. Mrs. Biddows had two fine wooden clothes posts and eighteen yards of clothes rope. They all thought they weren't movable. You have your car there for ten minutes you'll be lucky to find the chassis!"

So Robert got obediently into the car, and drove down to the grocer's. And as he drove he remembered something, and the memory puzzled him. This was where Betty Kane had been so happy. This rather dreary, rather grimy street; one of a warren of streets very like itself. So happy that she had written to say that she was staying on for the rest of her holidays.

What had she found here that was so desirable?

He was still wondering as he walked into the grocer's and prepared to spot Mrs. Tilsit among the morning customers. But there was no need for any guesswork. There was only one woman in the shop, and one glance at the grocer's patient face and the cardboard packet in the woman's either hand, made it plain that she was Mrs. Tilsit.

"Can I get you something, sir," the grocer said detaching himself for a moment from the woman's ponderings—it wasn't wheat flakes this morning, it was powdered soap—and moving towards Robert.

"No, thank you," Robert said. "I am just waiting for this lady."

"For me?" the woman said. "If it's the gas then—"

Robert said hastily that he wasn't the gas.

"I have a vacuum cleaner, and it's going fine," she offered, and prepared to go back to her problem.

Robert said that he had his car outside and would wait until she had finished, and was beating a hasty retreat; but she said: "A car! Oh. Well, you can drive me back, can't you, and save me carrying all those things. How much, Mr. Carr, please?"

Mr. Carr, who had taken a packet of soap-flakes from her during her interest in Robert and wedged it into her shopping-bag, took her money, gave her change, wished her a thankful good-day, and cast a pitiful glance at Robert as he followed the woman out to his car.

Robert had known that it was too much to hope for another woman with Mrs. Wynn's detachment and intelligence, but his heart sank as he considered Mrs. Tilsit. Mrs. Tilsit was one of those women whose minds are always on something else. They chat brightly with you, they agree with you, they admire what you are wearing, and they offer advice, but their real attention is concentrated on what to do with the fish, or what Florrie told them about Minnie's eldest, or where they have left the laundry book, or even just what a bad filling that is in your right front tooth; anything, everything, except the subject in hand.

She seemed impressed with the appearance of Robert's car, and asked him in to have a cup of tea—there being apparently no hour of the day when a cup of tea was not a possible article of diet. Robert felt that he could not drink with her—even a cup of tea—without making plain his position of opposing counsel, so to speak. He did his best, but it was doubtful if she understood; her mind was so plainly already deciding whether to offer him the Rich Tea or the Mixed Fancy biscuits with his tea. Mention of her niece made none of the expected stir in her emotions.

"A most extraordinary thing, that was, wasn't it?" she said. "Taking her away and beating her. What good did they think that was going to do them? Sit down, Mr. Blayne, come in and sit down. I'll just—"

A bloodcurdling scream echoed through the house. An urgent, high-pitched, desperate screaming that went on and on, without even a pause for breath.

Mrs. Tilsit humped her parcels in a movement of exasperation. She leaned near enough to Robert to put her mouth within shouting distance of his ear. "My kettle," she yelled. "I'll be right back."

Robert sat down, and again considered the surroundings and wondered why Betty Kane had found them so good. Mrs. Wynn's front room had been a living-room; a sitting-room warm with human occupation and human traffic. But this was clearly a "best" room, kept for visitors who were not intimate enough to be admitted to the back regions; the real life of the house was in the poky room at the back. Either kitchen or kitchen-sitting-room. And yet Betty Kane had elected to stay. Had she found a friend? A girl-next-door? A boy-next-door?

Mrs. Tilsit came back in what seemed like two minutes, bearing a tray with tea. Robert wondered a little at this promptness of action until he saw the tray's contents. Mrs. Tilsit had not wanted to make a decision; she had brought them both; Thin Wine and Sweet Shortbread. At least, he thought, watching her pour, this woman explained one of the oddities in the affair: the fact that when the Wynns had written to have Betty sent home at once, her aunt had not flown to a telegraph office to break the news that Betty had left for home nearly a fortnight ago. The Betty who had gone a fortnight previously would be much less real

in Mrs. Tilsit's mind than the jelly that was cooling on the back window-sill.

"I wasn't worried about her," Mrs. Tilsit said, as if in echo to his thoughts. "When they wrote from Aylesbury about her, I knew she would turn up. When Mr. Tilsit came home he was quite upset about it; he goes away for a week or ten days at a time you know; he's agent for Weekses; carried on like a mad thing, he did; but I just said you wait and she'll turn up all right, and she did. Well, nearly all right."

"She said she enjoyed her holiday here enormously."

"I suppose she did," she said vaguely, not looking gratified as Robert had expected. He glanced at her and realised that her mind was already on something else. The strength of his tea, if one was to judge by the direction of her eye.

"How did she pass her time? Did she make friends?"

"Oh, no, she was in Larborough most of the time."

"Larborough!"

"Oh well, when I say most of the time, I do her an injustice. She helped with the house in the mornings, but in a house this size and me used to doing everything myself there isn't much to do. And she was here on holiday, wasn't she, poor thing, after all that school work. What good all that book work is to a young girl I don't know. Mrs. Harrap's daughter over the way could hardly write her name but she married the third son of a lord. Or perhaps it was the son of a third son," she said, looking doubtful. "I forget for the minute. She—"

"How did she spend her time in Larborough? Betty, I mean."

"Pictures, mostly."

"Pictures? Oh the cinema, I see."

"You can do that from morning till night if you're given that way, in Larborough. The big ones open at half-past ten and they mostly change mid-week and there's about forty of them, so you can just go from one to another till it's time to go home."

"Is that what Betty did?"

"Oh, no. She's quite sensible, Betty is. She used to go in to the morning round because you get it cheaper before noon, and then she'd go bus-riding."

"Bus-riding. Where?"

"Oh, anywhere the fancy took her. Have another of these biscuits, Mr. Bain; they're fresh from the tin. She went to see the castle at Norton one day. Norton's the county town you know. Everyone imagines Larborough is because it's so big, but Norton's always been—"

"Did she not come home to lunch, then?"

"What? Oh, Betty. No, she'd have coffee lunch somewhere. We always have our real meal at night anyway, you see, with Mr. Tilsit being out all day, so there was always a meal waiting when she came home. It's always been my pride to have a good nourishing sit-down meal ready for my—"

"What time would that be? Six?"

"No, Mr. Tilsit doesn't usually manage home before half-past seven."

"And I suppose Betty was home long before then?"

"Mostly she was. She was late once because she went to an afternoon show at the pictures, but Mr. Tilsit he created about it—though I'm sure he had no need to, what harm can you come to at the pictures?—and after that she was always home before him. When he was here, that is. She wasn't so careful when he was away."

So the girl had been her own mistress for a good fortnight. Free to come and go without question, and limited only by the amount of holiday money in her pocket. It was an innocent-sounding fortnight; and in the case of most girls of her age it undoubtedly would have been that. The cinema in the morning, or window gazing; a coffee lunch; a bus-ride into the country in the afternoon. A blissful holiday for an adolescent; the first taste of unsupervised freedom.

But Betty Kane was no normal adolescent. She was the girl who had told that long and circumstantial story to the police without a tremor. The girl with four weeks of her life unaccounted for. The girl that someone had ended by beating unmercifully. How, then, had Betty Kane spent her unsupervised freedom?

"Did she go to Milford on the bus, do you know?"

"No, they asked me that, of course, but I couldn't say yes or no."

"They?"

"The police."

Yes, of course; he had forgotten for the moment that the police would have checked Betty Kane's every sentence to the limit of their power.

"You're not police, I think you said."

"No," Robert said yet once again. "I'm a lawyer. I represent the two women who are supposed to have detained Betty."

"Oh, yes. You told me. I suppose they have to have a lawyer like anyone else, poor things. To ask questions for them. I hope I'm telling you the things you want to know, Mr. Blayne."

He had another cup of tea in the hope that sooner or later she would tell him something he wanted to know. But it was mere repetition now.

"Did the police know that Betty was away on her own all day?" he asked.

She really thought about that. "That I can't remember," she said. "They asked me how she passed her time and I said that mostly she went to pictures or bus-riding, and they said did I go with her and I said—well, I'll have to admit I told a white lie about it and said I did now and then. I didn't want them to think that Betty went to places alone. Though of course there was no harm in it."

What a mind!

"Did she have letters while she was here?" he asked as he was taking his leave.

"Just from home. Oh, yes, I would know. I always took the letters in. In any case they wouldn't have written to her, would they?"

"Who?"

"Those women who kidnapped her."

It was with a feeling of escape that Robert drove in to Larborough. He wondered if Mr. Tilsit had always been away "ten days at a time" from his home, or if he had got the travelling job as an alternative to flight or suicide.

In Larborough, Blair sought out the main garage of the Larborough and District Motor Services. He knocked at the door of the small office that guarded one side of the entrance, and went in. A man in a bus inspector's uniform was going through papers on the desk. He glanced up at Robert and without asking his business continued his own affairs.

Robert said that he wanted to see someone who would know about the Milford bus service.

"Time table on the wall outside," the man said without looking up.

"I don't want to know about times. I know them. I live in Milford. I want to know if you ever run a double-decker bus on that route."

There was silence for a long time; a silence expertly calculated to end at the point where Robert was about to open his mouth again.

"No," said the man.

"Never?" Robert asked.

This time there was no answer at all. The inspector made it plain that he was finished with him.

"Listen," Robert said, "this is important. I am a partner in a firm of solicitors in Milford, and I—"

The man turned on him, "I don't care if you are the Shah of Persia; there are no double-decker buses on the Milford run! And what do you want?" he added as a small mechanic appeared behind Robert in the doorway.

The mechanic hesitated, as if the business he had come on had been upset by a newer interest. But he pulled himself together and began to state his business. "It's about those spares for Norton. Shall I—"

As Robert was edging past him out of the office he felt a tug on his coat and realised that the little mechanic wanted him to linger until he could talk to him. Robert went out and bent over his own car, and presently the mechanic appeared at his elbow.

"You asking about double-decker buses? I couldn't contradict him straight out, you know; in the mood he's in now it'd be as much as my job's worth. You want to *use* a double-decker, or just to know if they ever run at all? Because you can't *get* a double-decker on that route, not to travel in, because the buses on that run are all—"

"I know, I know. They are single-decks. What I wanted to know was whether there *ever* are two-deck buses on the Milford route."

"Well, there are not supposed to be, you understand, but once or twice this year we've had to use a double-decker when one of the old single ones broke down unexpected. Sooner or later they'll be all double-deck, but there isn't enough traffic on the Milford run to justify a double, so all the old crocks of singles eventually land on that route and a few more like it. And so—"

"You're a great help. Would it be possible to find out exactly when a double-decker did run on that route?"

"Oh, certainly," the mechanic said, with a shade of bitterness. "In this firm it's recorded every time you spit. But the records are in there," he tilted back his head to indicate the office, "and as long as be's there there's nothing doing."

Robert asked at what hour there would be something doing.

"Well: he goes off at the same time as me: six. But I could wait a few minutes and look up the schedules when he's gone if it's very important to you."

Robert did not know how he was going to wait through the hours till six o'clock, but six o'clock it would have to be.

"Righto. I'll meet you in the Bell, that's the pub at the end of the street, about a quarter past six. That do?"

That would do perfectly, Robert said. Perfectly.

And he went away to see what he could bribe the lounge waiter at the Midland into giving him out of hours.

I suppose you know what you're doing, dear," Aunt Lin said, "but I can't help thinking it's very odd of you to defend people like that."

"I am not 'defending' them," Robert said patiently, "I am representing them. And there is no evidence whatever that they are 'people like that.' "

"There is the girl's statement, Robert. She couldn't just have made all that up."

"Oh, couldn't she!"

"What advantage would it be to her to tell a lot of lies!" She was standing in his doorway passing her prayerbook from one hand to the other as she put on her white gloves. "What else could she have been doing if she wasn't at The Franchise?"

Robert bit back a "You'd be surprised!" It was always best with Aunt Lin to take the line of least resistance.

She smoothed her gloves into place. "If it's just that you're being noble, Robert dear, I must say you are just being wrong-headed. And do you have to go out to the *bouse!* Surely they could come to the office tomorrow. There's no hurry is there? It isn't as if someone was going to arrest them on the spot."

"It was my suggestion that I should go out to The Franchise. If someone accused *you* of stealing things off Woolworth's counter and you couldn't disprove it, I don't suppose you would enjoy walking down Milford High Street in broad daylight."

"I mightn't like it but I should most certainly do it and give Mr. Hensell a piece of my mind."

"Who is Mr. Hensell?"

"The manager. Couldn't you come to church with me first and then go out to The Franchise; it's such a long time since you've been, dear."

"If you stand there much longer you'll be late for the first time in ten years. You go and pray that my judgment may be perfected."

"I shall most certainly pray for you, dear. I always do. I shall also put up a little one for myself. All this is going to be very difficult for me."

"For you?"

"Now that you're acting for those people I shan't be able to talk about it to anyone. It is quite maddening, dear, to sit silent and hear everyone telling for gospel truth things you know for a fact are wrong. It's like wanting to be sick and having to postpone it. Oh, dear, the bells have stopped, haven't they? I'll just have to slip into the Bracketts' pew. They won't mind. You won't stay to lunch at that place, will you, dear."

"I don't suppose that I shall be invited."

But his welcome at The Franchise was so warm that he felt that he might very well be invited after all. He would say no, of course; not because Aunt Lin's chicken was waiting but because Marion Sharpe would have to do the washing up afterwards. When there was no one there they probably ate off trays. Or in the kitchen, for all anyone knew.

"I am sorry we refused to answer the telephone last night," Marion said, apologising again. "But after the fourth or fifth time it really was too much. And we didn't expect you to have news so soon. After all you had only set out on Friday afternoon."

"Your telephone callers: were they male or female?"

"One male, and four female, as far as I remember. When you rang this morning I thought it was beginning again, but they seem to be late-sleepers. Or perhaps they don't really get evil-minded much before evening. We certainly provided the Saturday evening's entertainment for the country youths. They congregated in a group inside the gate and cat-called. Then Nevil found a bar of wood in the out-house—"

"Nevil?"

"Yes, your nephew. I mean, your cousin. He came to pay what he called a visit of condolence, which was very nice of him. And he found a bar that could be wedged in the gateway to keep the thing shut; we have no key for it, you see. But of course that didn't stop them for long. They hoisted each other up on the wall, and sat there in a row being offensive until it was time for them to go to their beds."

"Lack of education," old Mrs. Sharpe said thoughtfully, "is an extraordinary handicap when one is being offensive. They had no resources at all."

"Neither have parrots," Robert said. "But they can be provocative enough. We must see what police protection we can claim. Meanwhile I can tell you something pleasanter about that wall. I know how the girl saw over it."

He told them about his visit to Mrs. Tilsit and his discovery that the girl amused herself by bus-riding (or said she did) and his subsequent visit to the Larborough and District Motor Services garage.

"In the fortnight that the girl was at Mainshill there were two breakdowns of single-deck buses due to go out on the Milford run; and each time a double-decker had to be substituted. There are only three services each way daily, you know. And each time the breakdown happened to the bus due to go out on the midday service. So there were at least two occasions in that fortnight when she could have seen the house, the courtyard, you two, and the car, all together."

"But could anyone passing on top of a bus take in so much?"

"Have you ever travelled on the upper deck of a country bus? Even when the bus is going at a steady thirty-five, the pace

seems funereal. What you can see is so much further away, and you can see it so much longer. Down below, the hedges brush the window and the pace seems good because things are closer. That is one thing. The other is that she has a photographic memory." And he told them what Mrs. Wynn had said.

"Do we tell the police this?" Mrs. Sharpe asked.

"No. It doesn't prove anything; just solves the problem of how she knew about you. When she needed an alibi she remembered you, and risked your not being able to prove that you were somewhere else. When you bring your car to the door, by the way, which side of the car is nearest the door?"

"Whether I bring it round from the garage or in from the road the off side is next to the door, because it's easier to get out of."

"Yes; so that the near side, with the darker paint on the front wheel, would be facing the gate," Robert said conclusively. "That is the picture she saw. The grass and the divided path, the car at the door with the odd wheel, two women—both individual—the round attic window in the roof. She had only to look at the picture in her mind and describe it. The day she was using the picture for—the day she was supposed to have been kidnapped—was more than a month away and it was a thousand to one against your being able to say what you had done or where you had been on that day."

"And I take it," Mrs. Sharpe said, "that the odds are very much greater against our being able to say what she has done or where she has been in that month."

"The odds are against us, yes. As my friend Kevin Macdermott pointed out last night, there is nothing to hinder her having been in Sydney, N.S.W. But somehow I am far more hopeful today than I was on Friday morning. We know so much more about the girl now." He told them of his interviews in Aylesbury and Mainshill.

"But if the police inquiries didn't unearth what she was doing that month—"

"The police inquiries were devoted to checking her statement. They didn't start, as we do, with the premise that her statement is untrue from beginning to end. They checked it and it checked. They had no particular reason to doubt it. She had a blameless reputation, and when they inquired from her aunt how she had spent her holiday time they found it had consisted of innocent visits to the cinema and country bus-rides."

"And what do you think it consisted of?" Mrs. Sharpe asked.

"I think she met someone in Larborough. That, anyhow, is the obvious explanation. It's from that supposition that I think any inquiry of ours should start."

"And what do we do about engaging an agent?" asked Mrs. Sharpe. "Do you know of one?"

"Well," Robert said, hesitating, "it had crossed my mind that you might let me pursue my own inquiries a little further before we engage a professional. I know that—"

"Mr. Blair," the old woman said, interrupting him, "you have been called into this unpleasant case without warning, and it cannot have been very willingly; and you have been very kind in doing your best for us. But we cannot expect you to turn yourself into a private inquiry agent on our behalf. We are not rich—indeed we have very little to live on—but as long as we have any money at all we shall pay for what services are proper. And it is not proper that you should turn yourself into a—what is it?—a Sexton Blake for our benefit."

"It may not be proper but it is very much to my taste. Believe me, Mrs. Sharpe, I hadn't planned it with any conscious thought of saving your pocket. Coming home in the car last night, very pleased with what I had done so far, I realised how much I should hate giving up the search to someone else. It had become a personal hunt. Please don't discourage me from—"

"If Mr. Blair is willing to carry on a little longer," Marion interrupted, "I think we should thank him heartily and accept. I know just how he feels. I wish I could go hunting myself."

"There will no doubt come a time when I shall have to turn it over to a proper inquiry agent whether I want to or not. If the trail leads far from Larborough, for instance. I have too many other commitments to follow it far. But as long as the search is on our doorsteps I do want to be the one to pursue it."

"How had you planned to pursue it?" Marion asked, interested.

"Well, I had thought of beginning with the coffee-lunch places. In Larborough, I mean. For one thing, there can't be so very many of them. And for another, we do know that, at any rate at the beginning, that was the kind of lunch she had."

"Why do you say 'at the beginning'?" Marion asked.

"Once she had met the hypothetical X, she may have lunched anywhere. But up till then she paid for her own lunches, and they were 'coffee' ones. A girl of that age prefers a bun lunch anyhow even if she has money for a two-course meal. So I concentrate on the coffee-places. I flourish the *Ack-Emma* at the waitresses and find out as tactfully as a country lawyer knows how whether they have ever seen the girl in their place. Does that sound like sense to you?"

"Very good sense," Marion said.

Robert turned to Mrs. Sharpe. "But if you think you will be better served by a professional—and that is more than possible—then I shall bow out with—"

"I don't think we could be better served by anyone," Mrs. Sharpe said. "I have expressed my appreciation already of the trouble you have gone to on our behalf. If it would really please you to run down this—this—"

"Moppet," supplied Robert happily.

"Mopsy," Mrs. Sharpe amended, "then we can only agree and be grateful. But it seems to me likely to be a very long run." "Why long?"

"There is a big gap, it seems to me, between meeting a hypothetical X in Larborough, and walking into a house near Aylesbury wearing nothing but a frock and shoes and well and truly beaten. Marion, there is still some of the Amontillado, I think."

In the silence that succeeded Marion's departure to fetch the sherry the quiet of the old house became apparent. There were no trees in the courtyard to make small noises in the wind and no birds to chatter. The silence was as absolute as the midnight

silence of a small town. Was it peaceful, Robert wondered, after the crowded life of a boarding-house? Or was it lonely and a little frightening?

They had valued its privacy, old Mrs. Sharpe had said in his office on Friday morning. But was it a good life shut in behind the high walls in the perpetual silence?

"It seems to me," Mrs. Sharpe said, "that the girl took a great risk in choosing The Franchise, knowing nothing of the household or its circumstances."

"Of course she took a risk," Robert said. "She had to. But I don't think it was as big a gamble as you think."

"No?"

"No. What you are saying is that for all the girl knew there might be a large household of young people and three maidservants at The Franchise."

"Yes."

"But I think she knew quite well that there was no such thing."

"How could she?"

"Either she gossiped with the bus-conductor, or—and I think this the more likely—she overheard comment from her fellow passengers. You know the kind of thing: 'There are the Sharpes. Fancy living alone in a big house like that, just the two of them. And no maids willing to stay in a lonely place so far from shops and the pictures—'and so on. It is very much a 'local' bus, that Larborough-Milford one. And it is a lonely route, with no wayside cottages and no village other than Ham Green. The Franchise is the only spot of human interest for miles. It would be more than human nature is capable of to pass the combined interest of the house, the owners, and their car without comments of some kind."

"I see. Yes, that makes sense."

"I wish, in a way, it *had* been through chatting with the conductor that she learned about you. That way, he would be more likely to remember her. The girl says she was never in Milford and doesn't know where it is. If a conductor remembered her, we could at least shake her story to that extent."

"If I know anything of the young person she would open those childlike eyes of hers and say: 'Oh, was that Milford? I just got on a bus and went to the terminus and back.' "

"Yes. It wouldn't take us very far. But if I fail to pick up the girl's trail in Larborough, I'll try her picture on the local conductors. I do wish she was a more memorable creature."

The silence fell round them again while they contemplated the un-memorable nature of Betty Kane.

They were sitting in the drawing-room, facing the window, looking out on the green square of the courtyard and faded pink of the brick wall. And as they looked the gate was pushed open and a small group of seven or eight people appeared and stood at gaze. Entirely at their ease they were; pointing out to each other the salient points of interest—the favourite being apparently the round window in the roof. If last night The Franchise had provided the country youth with its Saturday evening entertainment it was now, so it would seem, providing Sunday morning interest for Larborough. Certainly a couple of cars were waiting for them outside the gate, since the women of the party wore silly little shoes and indoor frocks.

Robert glanced across at Mrs. Sharpe, but except for a tightening of her always grim mouth she had not moved.

"Our public," she said at last, witheringly.

"Shall I go and move them on?" Robert said. "It's my fault for not putting back the wooden bar you left off for me."

"Let them be," she said. "They will go presently. This is what royalty puts up with daily; we can support it for a few

But the visitors showed no sign of going. Indeed, one group moved round the house to inspect the out-buildings; and the rest were still there when Marion came back with the sherry. Robert apologised again for not having put up the bar. He was feeling small and inadequate. It went against the grain to stay there quietly and watch strangers prowling round as if they owned the place or were contemplating buying it. But if he went out and asked them to move on and they refused to, what power had he to make them go? And how would he look in the Sharpes' eyes if he had to beat a retreat to the house and leave these people in possession?

The group of explorers came back from their tour round the house and reported with laughter and gesticulation what they had seen. He heard Marion say something under her breath and wondered if she were cursing. She looked like a woman who would have a very fine line in curses. She had put down the sherry tray and had apparently forgotten about it; it was no moment for hospitality. He longed to do something decisive and spectacular to please her, just as he longed to rescue his lady-love from burning buildings when he was fifteen. But alas, there was no surmounting the fact that he was forty-odd and had learned that it is wiser to wait for the fire-escape.

And while he hesitated, angry with himself and with those crude human creatures outside, the fire-escape arrived in the person of a tall young man in a regrettable tweed suit.

"Nevil," breathed Marion, watching the picture.

Nevil surveyed the group with his most insufferable air of superiority, and it seemed that they wilted slightly, but they were evidently determined to stand their ground. Indeed, the male with the sports jacket and the pinstriped trousers was clearly preparing to make an issue of it.

Nevil looked at them silently for a further few seconds and then fished in his inner pocket for something. At the first movement of his hand a strange difference came over the group. The outer members of it detached themselves and faded unobtrusively through the gate; the nearer ones lost their air of bravado, and became placatory. Finally the sports-jacket made small rejecting movements of surrender and joined the retreat through the gate.

Nevil banged the gate to behind them, levered the wooden bar into place, and strolled up the path to the door wiping his hands fastidiously on a really shocking handkerchief. And Marion ran out to the door to meet him.

"Nevil!" Robert heard her say. "How did you do it?"

"Do what?" Nevil asked.

"Get rid of those creatures."

"Oh. I just asked their names and addresses," Nevil said. "You've no idea how discreet people become if you take out a notebook and ask for their name and address. It's the modern equivalent to: 'Fly, all is discovered.' They don't wait to ask your credentials in case you may actually have some. Hello, Robert. Good morning, Mrs. Sharpe. I'm actually on my way to Larborough, but I saw the gate open and these two frightful cars outside so I stopped to investigate. I didn't know Robert was here."

This quite innocent implication that of course Robert was capable of dealing equally well with the situation was the unkindest cut of all. Robert could have brained him.

"Well, now that you are here and have so expertly rid us of the nuisance you must stay and drink a glass of sherry," Mrs. Sharpe said.

"Could I come in and drink it on my way home in the evening?" Nevil said. "You see, I'm on my way to lunch with my prospective father-in-law and it being Sunday there is a ritual. One must be there for the warming-up exercises."

"But of course come in on your way home," Marion said. "We shall be delighted. How shall we know it is you? For the gate, I mean." She was pouring sherry and handing it to Robert.

"Do you know morse?"

"Yes, but don't tell me you do."

"Why not?"

"You look a most unlikely morse addict."

"Oh, when I was fourteen I was going to sea, and I acquired in the heat of my ambition a lot of incidental idiocies. Morse was one of them. I shall hoot the initials of your beautiful name on the horn, when I come. Two longs and three shorts. I must fly. The thought of talking to you tonight will support me through luncheon at the Palace."

"Won't Rosemary be any support?" Robert asked, overcome by his baser self.

"I shouldn't think so. On Sundays Rosemary is a daughter in her father's house. It is a role that does not become her. *Au revoir*, Mrs. Sharpe. Don't let Robert drink all the sherry."

"And when," Robert heard Marion ask as she went with him to the door, "did you decide not to go to sea?"

"When I was fifteen. I took up ballooning instead."

"Theoretical, I suppose."

"Well, I gassed about gases."

Why did they sound so friendly, so at ease, Robert wondered. As if they had known each other a long time. Why did she like that light-weight Nevil?

"And when you were sixteen?"

If she knew how many things Nevil had taken up and dropped in his time she might not be so pleased to be the latest of them.

"Is the sherry too dry for you, Mr. Blair," Mrs. Sharpe asked.

"No, oh no, thank you, it is excellent." Was it possible that he had been looking sour? Perish the thought.

He stole a cautious glance at the old lady and thought that she was looking faintly amused. And old Mrs. Sharpe being amused was no comfortable sight.

"I think I had better go before Miss Sharpe bars the gate behind Nevil," he said. "Otherwise she will have to come to the gate again with me."

"But won't you stay and have lunch with us? There is no ritual about it at The Franchise."

But Robert made his excuses. He didn't like the Robert Blair he was becoming. Petty and childish and inadequate. He would go back and have ordinary Sunday lunch with Aunt Lin and be again Robert Blair of Blair, Hayward, and Bennet, equable and tolerant and at peace with his world.

Nevil had gone by the time he reached the gate, in a flurry of sound that shattered the Sabbath quiet, and Marion was about to close the gate.

"I can't think that the Bishop approves of his future son-in-law's means of transport," she said looking after the roaring object as it streaked down the road.

"Exhausting," Robert said, still caustic.

She smiled at him. "I think that is the first witty pun I have ever heard anyone make," she said. "I hoped you would stay for lunch, but in a way I'm rather relieved that you aren't."

"Are you indeed?"

"I made a 'shape' but it didn't stand up. I'm a very bad cook. I do faithfully what it says in the book but it hardly ever works out. Indeed I'm surprised to death when it does. So you will be better off with your Aunt Lin's apple tart."

And Robert suddenly and illogically wished that he was staying, to share the "shape" that had not stood up and to be gently mocked by her along with her cooking.

"I'll let you know tomorrow night how I get on in Larborough," he said matter-of-factly. Since he was not on hens-and-Maupassant terms with her he would keep the conversation to practicalities. "And I'll ring up Inspector Hallam and see if one of their men can give a look round The Franchise once or twice a day; just to show the uniform, so to speak, and to discourage idlers."

"You are very kind, Mr. Blair," she said. "I can't imagine what it would be without you to lean on."

Well, if he couldn't be young and a poet, he could be a crutch. A dull thing, a thing resorted to only in emergencies, but useful; useful.

By half-past ten on Monday morning he was sitting in front of a steaming cup of coffee in the Karena. He began with the Karena because when one thinks of coffee at all one thinks of a Karena, with the smell of the roasting coffee downstairs in the shop and the liquid version waiting upstairs among the little tables. And if he was going to have a surfeit of coffee he might as well have some good stuff while he could still taste it.

He was holding *the Ack-Emma* in his hand with the girl's photograph open to the gaze of the waitresses as they passed, hoping vaguely that his interest in it might cause one of them to say: "That girl used to come in here every morning." To his surprise the paper was gently removed from his grasp, and he looked up to see his waitress regarding him with a kind smile. "That is last Friday's," she said. "Here." And she proffered that morning's *Ack-Emma*.

He thanked her and said that while he would be glad to see this morning's paper he would like to keep the Friday one. Did this girl, this girl on the front page of Friday's, ever come in there for coffee?

"Oh, no, we'd have remembered her if she did. We were all discussing that case on Friday. Imagine beating her half to death like that."

"Then you think they did."

She looked puzzled. "The paper says they did."

"No, the paper reports what the girl said."

She obviously did not follow that. This was the democracy we deified.

"They wouldn't print a story like that if it wasn't true. It would be as much as their life's worth. You a detective?"

"Part time," Robert said.

"How much do you get an hour for that?"

"Not nearly enough."

"No, I suppose not. Haven't got a Union, I suppose. You don't get your rights in this world unless you have a Union."

"Too true," said Robert. "Let me have my bill, will you?"

"Your check, yes."

At the Palace, the biggest and newest of the cinemas, the restaurant occupied the floor behind the balcony and had carpets so deep that one tripped on them, and lighting so subdued that all the cloths looked dirty. A bored houri with gilt hair, an uneven hem to her skirt, and a wad of chewing gum in her right jaw, took his order without ever glancing at him, and fifteen minutes later put down a cup of washy liquid in front of him without letting her eyes stray even approximately in his direction. Since in the fifteen minutes Robert had discovered that the never-look-at-the-customers technique was universal—presumably they were all going to be film stars the year after next and could not be expected to take any interest in a provincial clientèle—he paid for the untasted liquid and left.

At the Castle, the other big cinema, the restaurant did not open until afternoon.

At the Violet—royal purple everywhere and yellow curtains—no one had seen her. Robert, casting subtleties aside, asked them bluntly.

Upstairs at Grillon and Waldron's, the big store, it was rush hour and the waitress said: "Don't bother me!" The manageress, looking at him with absent-minded suspicion, said: "We never give information about our customers."

At the Old Oak—small and dark and friendly—the elderly waitresses discussed the case interestedly with him. "Poor love," they said. "What an experience for her. Such a nice face, too. Just a baby. Poor love."

At the Alençon—cream paint and old-rose couches against the walls—they made it plain that they had never heard of the *Ack-Emma* and could not possibly have a client whose photograph appeared in such a publication.

At the Heave Ho—marine frescos and waitresses in bell-bottomed trousers—the attendants gave it as their unanimous opinion that any girl who took a lift should expect to have to walk home.

At the Primrose—old polished tables with raffia mats and thin unprofessional waitresses in flowered smocks—they discussed the social implications of lack of domestic service and the vagaries of the adolescent mind.

At the Tea-Pot there was no table to be had, and no waitress willing to attend to him; but a second glance at the fly-blown place made him sure that, with the others to choose from, Betty Kane would not have come here.

At half-past twelve he staggered into the lounge of the Midland, and called for strong waters. As far as he knew he had covered all the likely eating-places in the centre of Larborough and in not one of them had anyone remembered seeing the girl. What was worse, everyone agreed that if she had been there they would have remembered her. They had pointed out, when Robert was sceptical of that, that a large proportion of their customers on any one day were regulars, so that the casuals stood out from the rest and were noted and remembered automatically.

As Albert, the tubby little lounge waiter, set his drink in front of him, Robert asked, more out of habit than volition: "I suppose you've never seen this girl in your place, Albert?"

Albert looked at the front page of the Ack-Emma and shook his head. "No sir. Not that I recollect. Looks a little young, sir, if I may say so, for the lounge of the Midland."

"She mightn't look so young with a hat on," Robert said, considering it.

"A hat." Albert paused. "Now, wait a minute. A *bat*." Albert laid his little tray down and picked up the paper to consider it. "Yes, of course; that's the girl in the green hat!"

"You mean she came in here for coffee?"

"No, for tea."

"Tea!"

"Yes, of course, that's the girl. Fancy me not seeing that, and we had that paper in the pantry last Friday and chewed the rag over it for hours! Of course it's some time ago now, isn't it. About six weeks or so, it must be. She always came early; just about three, when we start serving teas."

So that is what she did. Fool that he was not to have seen that. She went into the morning round at the cinema in time to pay the cheaper price—just before noon, that was—and came out about three, and had tea, not coffee. But why the Midland, where the tea was the usual dowdy and expensive hotel exhibit, when she could wallow in cakes elsewhere?

"I noticed her because she always came alone. The first time she came I thought she was waiting for relations. That's the kind of kid she looked. You know: nice plain clothes and no airs."

"Can you remember what she wore?"

"Oh, yes. She always wore the same things. A green hat and a frock to match it under a pale grey coat. But she never met anyone. And then one day she picked up the man at the next table. You could have knocked me over with a feather."

"You mean: he picked her up."

"Don't you believe it! He hadn't even thought of her when he sat down there. I tell you, sir, she didn't look that sort. You'd expect an aunt or a mother to appear at any moment and say: 'So sorry to have kept you waiting, darling.' She just wouldn't occur to any man as a possible. Oh, no; it was the kid's doing. And as neat a piece of business, let me tell you, sir, as if she had spent a lifetime at it. Goodness, and to think that I didn't spot her again without her hat!" He gazed in wonder at the pictured face.

"What was the man like? Did you know him?"

"No, he wasn't one of our regulars. Dark. Youngish. Business gent, I should say. I remember being a little surprised at her taste, so I don't think he could have been up to much, now I come to think of it."

"You wouldn't know him again, then."

"I might, sir, I might. But not to swear to. You—er—planning any swearing to, sir?"

Robert had known Albert for nearly twenty years and had always found him of an excellent discretion. "It's like this, Albert," he said. "These people are my clients." He tapped the photograph of The Franchise, and Albert gave vent to a low whistle.

"A tough spot for you, Mr. Blair."

"Yes, as you say: a tough spot. But mostly for them. It is quite unbelievably tough for them. The girl comes out of the blue one day accompanied by the police, to whom she has told this fantastic story. Until then neither of the two women has ever set eyes on her. The police are very discreet, and decide that they haven't enough evidence to make it a good case. Then the Ack-Emma hears about it and makes capital out of it, and the story is all over Britain. The Franchise is wide open, of course. The police can't spare men to afford constant protection, so you can imagine the lives these women are leading. My young cousin, who looked in before dinner last night, says that from lunch-time on crowds of cars arrived from Larborough, and people stood on the roofs or hoisted themselves up on the wall to stare or take photographs. Nevil got in because he arrived at the same time as the policeman on the evening beat, but as soon as they left the cars were swarming again. The telephone went continually until they asked the Exchange not to put through any more calls."

"Have the police dropped it for good, then?"

"No, but they can't do anything to help us. What they are looking for is corroboration of the girl's story."

"Well, that's not likely is it? For them to get, I mean."

"No. But you see the spot we are in. Unless we can find out where the girl was during the weeks she says she was at The Franchise, the Sharpes will be in the position of being permanently convicted of a thing they haven't even been accused of!"

"Well, if it's the girl in the green hat—and I'm sure it is, sir—I'd say she was what is known as 'out on the tiles,' sir. A very cool customer she was for a girl that age. Butter wouldn't melt in her mouth."

"Butter wouldn't melt in her little mouth," the tobacconist had said of the child Betty.

And "on the tiles" was Stanley's verdict on the pictured face that was so like "the bint he had had in Egypt."

And the worldly little waiter had used both phrases in his estimate of her. The demure girl in the "good" clothes, who had come every day by herself to sit in the hotel lounge.

"Perhaps it was just a childish desire to be 'grand,' " the nice side of him prompted; but his common sense refused it. She could have been grand at the Alençon, and eaten well, and seen smart clothes at the same time.

He went in to have lunch, and then spent a large part of the afternoon trying to reach Mrs. Wynn on the telephone. Mrs. Tilsit had no telephone and he had no intention of involving himself in a Tilsit conversation again if he could help it. When he failed he remembered that Scotland Yard would most certainly, in that painstaking way of theirs, have a description of the clothes the girl was wearing when she went missing. And in less than seven minutes, he had it. A green felt hat, a green wool frock to match, a pale grey cloth coat with large grey buttons, fawn-grey rayon stockings and black court shoes with medium heels.

Well, at last he had it, that setting-off place; that starting-point for inquiry. Jubilation filled him. He sat down in the lounge on his way out and wrote a note to tell Kevin Macdermott that the young woman from Aylesbury was not such an attractive brief as she had been on Friday night; and to let him know, of course—between the lines—that Blair, Hayward, and Bennet could get a move on when it was necessary.

"Did she ever come back?" he asked Albert, who was hovering. "I mean, after she had 'got her man.' "

"I don't remember ever seeing either of them again, sir."

Well, the hypothetical X had ceased to be hypothetical. He had become plain X. He, Robert, could go back tonight to The Franchise in triumph. He had put forward a theory, and the theory had proved fact, and it was he who had proved it a fact. It was depressing, of course, that the letters received so far by Scotland Yard had all been merely anonymous revilings of the Yard for their "softness" to the "rich," and not claims to have seen Betty Kane. It was depressing that practically everyone he had interviewed that morning believed the girl's story without question; were, indeed, surprised and at a loss if asked to consider any other point of view. "The paper said so." But these were small things compared to the satisfaction of having arrived at that starting-point; of having unearthed X. He didn't believe that fate could be so cruel as to show that Betty Kane parted with her new acquaintance on the steps of the Midland and never saw him again. There had to be an extension of that incident in the lounge. The history of the following weeks demanded it.

But how did one follow up a young dark business gent who had tea in the lounge of the Midland about six weeks previously? Young dark business gents were the Midland's clientèle; and as far as Blair could see all as like as two peas anyhow. He was very much afraid that this was where he bowed out and handed over to a professional bloodhound. He had no photograph this time to help him; no knowledge of X's character or habits as he had had in the case of the girl. It would be a long process of small inquiries; a job for an expert. All he could do at the moment, so far as he could see, was to get a list of residents at the Midland for the period in question.

For that he went to the Manager; a Frenchman who showed great delight and understanding in this *sub rosa* proceeding, was exquisitely sympathetic about the outraged ladies at The Franchise, and comfortingly cynical about smooth-faced young girls in good clothes who looked as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths. He sent an underling to copy the entries from the great ledger, and entertained Robert to a *sirop* from his own cupboard. Robert had never subscribed to the French taste for small sweet mouthfuls of unidentifiable liquids drunk at odd times, but he swallowed the thing gratefully and pocketed the list the underling brought as one pockets a passport. Its actual value was probably nil, but it gave him a nice feeling to have it.

And if he had to turn over the business to a professional, the professional would have somewhere to start his burrowing. X had probably never stayed at the Midland in his life; he had probably just walked in for tea one day. On the other hand, his name might be among that list in his pocket; that horribly long list.

As he drove home he decided that he would not stop at The Franchise. It was unfair to bring Marion to the gate just to give her news that could be told over the telephone. He would tell the Exchange who he was, and the fact that the call was official, and they would answer it. Perhaps by tomorrow the first flood of interest in the house would have subsided, and it would be safe to unbar the gate again. Though he doubted it. Today's *Ack-Emma* had not been calculated to have an appeasing effect on the mob mind. True, there were no further front-page headlines; the Franchise affair had removed itself to the correspondence page. But the letters the *Ack-Emma* had chosen to print there—and two-thirds of them were about the Franchise affair—were not likely to prove oil on troubled waters. They were so much paraffin on a fire that was going quite nicely anyhow.

Threading his way out of the Larborough traffic, the silly phrases came back to him; and he marvelled all over again at the venom that these unknown women had roused in the writers' minds. Rage and hatred spilled over on to the paper; malice ran unchecked through the largely-illiterate sentences. It was an amazing exhibition. And one of the oddities of it was that the dearest wish of so many of those indignant protesters against violence was to flog the said women within an inch of their lives. Those who did not want to flog the women wanted to reform the police. One writer suggested that a fund should be opened for the poor young victim of police inefficiency and bias. Another suggested that every man of goodwill should write to his Member of Parliament about it, and make their lives a misery until something was done about this miscarriage of justice. Still another asked if anyone had noticed Betty Kane's marked resemblance to Saint Bernadette.

There was every sign, if today's correspondence page of the *Ack-Emma* was any criterion, of the birth of a Betty Kane cult. He hoped that its corollary would not be a Franchise vendetta.

As he neared the unhappy house, he grew anxious; wondering if Monday, too, had provided its quota of sightseers. It was a lovely evening, the low sun slanting great golden swathes of light over the spring fields; an evening to tempt even Larborough out to the midland dullness of Milford; it would be a miracle if, after the correspondence in *the Ack-Emma*, The Franchise was not the mecca of an evening pilgrimage. But when he came within sight of it he found the long stretch of road deserted; and as he came nearer he saw why. At the gate of The Franchise, solid and immobile and immaculate in the evening light, was the dark-blue-and-silver figure of a policeman.

Delighted that Hallam had been so generous with his scanty force, Robert slowed down to exchange greetings; but the greeting died on his lips. Along the full length of the tall brick wall, in letters nearly six feet high was splashed a slogan. "FASCISTS!" screamed the large white capitals. And again on the further side of the gate: "FASCISTS!"

"Move along, please," the Force said, approaching the staring Robert with slow, polite menace. "No stopping here."

Robert got slowly out of the car.

"Oh, Mr. Blair. Didn't recognise you, sir. Sorry."

"Is it whitewash?"

"No, sir; best quality paint."

"Great Heavens!"

"Some people never grow out of it."

"Out of what?"

"Writing things on walls. There's one thing: they might have written something worse."

"They wrote the worst insult they knew," said Robert wryly. "I suppose you haven't got the culprits?"

"No, sir. I just came along on my evening beat to clear away the usual gapers—oh, yes, there were dozens of them—and found it like that when I arrived. Two men in a car, if all reports are true."

"Do the Sharpes know about it?"

"Yes, I had to get in to telephone. We have a code now, us and the Franchise people. I tie my handkerchief on the end of my

truncheon and wave it over the top of the gate when I want to speak to them. Do you want to go in, sir?"

"No. No, on the whole I think not. I'll get the Post Office to let me through on the telephone. No need to bring them to the gate. If this is going to continue they must get keys for the gate so that I can have a duplicate."

"Looks as though it's going to continue all right, sir. Did you see today's Ack-Emma?"

"I did."

"Strewth!" said the Force, losing his equanimity at the thought of the *Ack-Emma*, "you would think to listen to them we were nothing but a collection of itching palms! It's a holy wonder we're not, come to that. It would suit them better to agitate for more pay for us instead of slandering us right and left."

"You're in very good company, if it's any consolation to you," Robert said. "There can't be anything established, respectable, or praiseworthy that they haven't slandered at some time or other. I'll send someone either tonight or first thing in the morning to do something about this—obscenity. Are you staying here?"

"The sergeant said when I telephoned that I was to stay till dark."

"No one over-night?"

"No, sir. No spare men for that. Anyhow, they'll be all right once the light's gone. People go home. Especially the Larborough lot. They don't like the country once it gets dark."

Robert, who remembered how silent the lonely house could be, felt doubtful. Two women, alone in that big quiet house after dark, with hatred and violence just outside the wall—it was not a comfortable thought. The gate was barred, but if people could hoist themselves on to the wall for the purpose of sitting there and shouting insults, they could just as easily drop down the other side in the dark.

"Don't worry, sir," the Force said, watching his face. "Nothing's going to happen to them. This is England, after all."

"So is the *Ack-Emma* England," Robert reminded him. But he got back into the car again. After all, it *was* England; and the English countryside at that: famed for minding its own business. It was no country hand that had splashed that "FASCISTS!" on the wall. It was doubtful if the country had ever heard the term. The country, when it wanted insults, used older, Saxon words.

The Force was no doubt right; once the dark came everyone would go home.

As Robert turned his car into the garage in Sin Lane and came to a halt, Stanley, who was shrugging off his overalls outside the office door, glanced at his face and said: "Down the drain again?

"You start to be sorry about human nature and you won't have time for anything else. You been trying to reform someone?"

"No, I've been trying to get someone to take some paint off a wall.

"Oh, work!" Stanley's tone indicated that even to expect someone to do a job of work these days was being optimistic to the point of folly.

"I've been trying to get someone to wipe a slogan off the walls of The Franchise, but everyone is extraordinarily busy all of a sudden."

Stanley stopped his wriggling. "A slogan," he said. "What kind of slogan?" And Bill, hearing the exchange, oozed himself through the narrow office door to listen.

Robert told them. "In best quality white paint, so the policeman on the beat assures me."

Bill whistled. Stanley said nothing; he was standing with his overalls shrugged down to his waist and concertinaed about his legs.

"Who've you tried?" Bill asked.

Robert told them. "None of them can do anything tonight, and tomorrow morning, it seems, all their men are going out early on important jobs."

"It's not to be believed," Bill said. "Don't tell me they're afraid of reprisals!"

"No, to do them justice I don't think it's that. I think, although they would never say so to me, that they think those women at The Franchise deserve it." There was silence for a moment.

"When I was in the Signals," Stanley said, beginning in a leisurely fashion to pull up his overalls and get into the top half again, "I was given a free tour of Italy. Nearly a year it took. And I escaped the malaria, and the Ities, and the Partisans, and the Yank transport, and most of the other little nuisances. But I got a phobia. I took a great dislike to slogans on walls."

"What'll we get it off with?" Bill asked.

"What's the good of owning the best equipped and most modern garage in Milford, if we haven't something to take off a spot of paint?" Stanley said, zipping up his front.

"Will you really try to do something about it?" Robert asked, surprised and pleased.

Bill smiled his slow expansive smile. "The Signals, the R.E.M.E. and a couple of brooms. What more do you want?" he said.

"Bless you," Robert said. "Bless you both. I have only one ambition tonight; to get that slogan off the wall before breakfast tomorrow. I'll come along and help."

"Not in that Savile Row suit, you won't," Stanley said. "And we haven't a spare suit of-"

"I'll get something old on and come out after you."

"Look," Stanley said patiently. "We don't need any help for a little job like that. If we did we'd take Harry." Harry was the garage boy. "You haven't eaten yet and we have, and I've heard it said that Miss Bennet doesn't like her good meals spoiled. I suppose you don't mind if the wall looks smeary? We're just good-intentioned garage hands, not decorators."

The shops were shut as he walked down the High Street to his home at Number 10, and he looked at the place as a stranger walking through on a Sunday night. He had been so far from Milford during his day in Larborough that he felt that he had been away for years. The comfortable quiet of Number 10—so different from the dead silence of The Franchise—welcomed and soothed him. A faint smell of roasting apples escaped from the kitchen. The firelight flickered on the wall of the sitting-room, seen through its half-open door. Warmth and security and comfort rose up in a gentle tide and lapped over him.

Guilty at being the owner of this waiting peace, he picked up the telephone to talk to Marion.

"Oh, you! How nice," she said, when at last he had persuaded the Post Office that his intentions were honourable; and the warmth in her voice catching him unawares—his mind being still on white paint—caught him under the heart and left him breathless for a moment. "I'm so glad. I was wondering how we were going to talk to you; but I might have known that you would manage it. I suppose you just say you're Robert Blair and the Post Office gives you the freedom of the place."

How like her, he thought. The genuine gratitude of "I might have known that you would manage"; and then the faint amusement in the sentence that followed.

"I suppose you've seen our wall decoration?"

Robert said yes, but that no one ever would again, because by the time the sun rose it would have gone.

"Tomorrow!"

"The two men who own my garage have decided to obliterate it tonight."

"But—could seven maids with seven mops—?"

"I don't know; but if Stanley and Bill have set their minds on it, obliterated it will be. They were brought up in a school that doesn't tolerate frustrations."

"What school is that?"

"The British Army. And I have more good news for you: I have established the fact that X exists. She had tea with him one

day. Picked him up at the Midland, in the lounge."

"Picked him up? But she is just a child, and so—Oh, well, she told that story, of course. After that anything is possible. How did you find out that?"

He told her.

"You've had a bad day at The Franchise, haven't you," he said, when he had finished the saga of the coffee shops.

"Yes, I feel dirty all over. What was worse than the audience and the wall was the post. The postman gave it to the police to take in. It is not often that the police can be accused of disseminating obscene literature."

"Yes, I imagine it must have been pretty bad. That was only to be expected."

"Well, we have so few letters that we have decided that in future we shall burn everything without opening them, unless we recognise the writing. So don't use typescript if you write to us."

"But do you know my handwriting?"

"Oh, yes, you wrote us a note, you remember. The one Nevil brought that afternoon. Nice handwriting."

"Have you seen Nevil today?"

"No, but one of the letters was from him. At least it wasn't a letter."

"A document of some kind?"

"No, a poem."

"Oh. Did you understand it?"

"No, but it made quite a nice sound."

"So do bicycle bells."

He thought she laughed a little. "It is nice to have poems made to one's eyebrows," she said. "But still nicer to have one's wall made clean. I do thank you for that—you and what's-their-names—Bill and Stanley. If you want to be very kind perhaps you would bring or send us some food tomorrow?"

"Food!" he said, horrified that he had not thought of that before; that was what happened when you lived a life where Aunt Lin put everything down in front of you, all but put the stuff in your mouth; you lost your capacity for imagination. "Yes, of course. I forgot that you would not be able to shop."

"It isn't only that. The grocer's van that calls on Monday didn't come today. Or perhaps," she added hastily, "it came and just couldn't call our attention. Anyhow, we should be so grateful for some things. Have you got a pencil there?"

She gave him a list of things, and then asked: "We didn't see today's Ack-Emma. Was there anything about us?"

"Some letters on the correspondence page, that is all."

"All anti, I suppose."

"I'm afraid so. I shall bring a copy out tomorrow morning when I bring the groceries, and you can see it for yourselves."

"I'm afraid we are taking up a great deal of your time."

"This has become a personal matter with me," he said.

"Personal?" She sounded doubtful.

"The one ambition of my life is to discredit Betty Kane."

"Oh; oh, I see." Her voice sounded half relieved, half—could it be?—disappointed. "Well, we shall look forward to seeing you tomorrow."

But she was to see him long before that.

He went to bed early, but lay long awake; rehearsing a telephone conversation that he planned to have with Kevin Macdermott; considering different approaches to the problem of X; wondering if Marion was asleep, in that silent old house, or lying awake listening for sounds.

His bedroom was over the street, and about midnight he heard a car drive up and stop, and presently through the open window he heard Bill's cautious call; not much more than a throaty whisper. "Mr. Blair! Hey, Mr. Blair!"

He was at the window almost before the second utterance of his name.

"Thank goodness," whispered Bill. "I was afraid the light might be Miss Bennet's."

"No, she sleeps at the back. What is it?"

"There's trouble at The Franchise. I've got to go for the police because the wire is cut. But I thought you'd want to be called, so I—"

"What kind of trouble?"

"Hooligans. I'll come in for you on my way back. In about four minutes."

"Is Stanley with them?" Robert asked, as Bill's great bulk merged with the car again.

"Yes, Stan's having his head bound up. Back in a minute." And the car fled away up the dark silent High Street.

Before Robert had got his clothes on he heard a soft "ssshush" go past his window, and realised that the police were already on their way. No screaming sirens in the night, no roaring exhausts; with no more sound than a summer wind makes among the leaves the Law was going about its business. As he opened the front door, cautiously so as not to wake Aunt Lin (nothing but the last trump was likely to wake Christina) Bill brought his car to a standstill at the pavement.

"Now tell me," Robert said, as they moved away.

"Well, we finished that little job by the light of the head-lamps—not very professional, it isn't, but a lot better than it was when we got there—and then we switched off the heads, and began to put away our things. Sort of leisurely like; there was no hurry and it was a nice night. We'd just lit a cigarette and were thinking of pushing off when there was a crash of glass from the house. No one had got in our side while we were there, so we knew it must be round the sides or the back. Stan reached into the car and took out his torch—mine was lying on the seat because we'd been using it—and said: 'You go round that way and I'll go the other and we'll nip them between us.'"

"Can you get round?"

"Well, it was no end of a business. It's hedge up to the wall end. I wouldn't like to have done it in ordinary clothes, but in overalls, you just push hard and hope for the best. It's all right for Stan; he's slim. But short of lying on the hedge till it falls down there's no way through for me. Anyhow we got through, one on each side, and through the one at the back corners, and met in the middle of the back without seeing a soul. Then we heard more crashing of glass, and realised that they were making a night of it. Stan said: 'Hoist me up, and I'll give you a hand after me.' Well, a hand would be no good to me, but it happens that the field level at the back comes fairly high up the wall—in fact I think it was probably cut away to build the wall—so that we got over fairly easily. Stan said had I anything to hit with besides my torch and I said yes, I had a spanner. Stan said: 'Forget your bloody spanner and use your ham fist; it's bigger.'"

"What was he going to use?"

"The old rugby tackle, so he said. Stan used to be quite a good stand-off half. Anyhow we went on in the dark towards the sound of the crashing glass. It seemed as if they were just having a breaking tour round the house. We caught up with them near the front corner again, and switched on our torches. I think there were seven of them. Far more than we had expected, anyhow. We switched off at once, before they could see that we were only two, and grabbed the nearest. Stan said: 'You take that one, sergeant,' and I thought at the time he was giving me my rank out of old habit, but I realise now he was bluffing them we were police. Anyhow some of them beat it, because though there was a mix-up there couldn't have been anything like seven of them in it. Then, quite suddenly it seemed, there was quiet—we'd been making a lot of noise—and I realised that we were letting them get away, and Stan said from somewhere on the ground: 'Grab one, Bill, before they get over the wall!' And I went after them with my torch on. The last of them was just being helped over, and I grabbed his legs and hung on. But he kicked like a mule, and what with the torch in my hand he slipped from my hands like a trout and was over before I could grab him again. That finished me, because from inside that wall at the back is even higher than it is at the front of the house. So I went back to Stan. He was still sitting on the ground. Someone had hit him a wallop over the head with what he said was a bottle and he was looking very cheap. And then Miss Sharpe came out to the top of the front steps, and said was someone hurt? She could see us in the torchlight. So we got Stan in—the old lady was there and the house was lit by this time—and I went to the phone, but Miss Sharpe said: 'That's no use. It's dead. We tried to call the police when they first arrived.' So I said I'd go and fetch them. And I said I'd better fetch you too. But Miss Sharpe said no, you'd had a very hard day and I wasn't to disturb you. But I thought you ought to be in on it."

"Quite right Bill, I ought."

The gate was wide open as they drew up, the police car at the door, most of the front rooms lit, and the curtains waving gently in the night wind at the wrecked windows. In the drawing-room—which the Sharpes evidently used as a living-room—Stanley was having a cut above his eyebrow attended to by Marion, a sergeant of police was taking notes, and his henchman was laying out exhibits. The exhibits seemed to consist of half bricks, bottles, and pieces of paper with writing on them.

"Oh, Bill, I told you not to," Marion said as she looked up and saw Robert.

Robert noted how efficiently she was dealing with Stanley's injury; the woman who found cooking beyond her. He greeted the sergeant and bent to look at the exhibits. There was a large array of missiles but only four messages; which read, respectively: "Get out!" "Get out or we'll make you!" "Foreign bitches!" and "This is only a sample!"

"Well, we've collected them all, I think," the sergeant said. "Now, we'll go and search the garden for footprints or whatever clues there may be." He glanced professionally at the soles that Bill and Stanley held up at his request, and went out with his aide to the garden, as Mrs. Sharpe came in with a steaming jug and cups.

"Ah, Mr. Blair," she said. "You still find us stimulating?

She was fully dressed—in contrast to Marion who was looking quite human and un-Joan-of-Arc in an old dressing-gown—and apparently unmoved by these proceedings, and he wondered what kind of occasion would find Mrs. Sharpe at a disadvantage.

Bill appeared with sticks from the kitchen and lighted the dead fire. Mrs. Sharpe poured the hot liquid—it was coffee and Robert refused it, having seen enough coffee lately to lose interest in it—and the colour began to come back to Stan's face. By the time the policemen came back from the garden the room had acquired a family-party air, in spite of the waving curtains and the non-existent windows. Neither Stanley nor Bill, Robert noticed, appeared to find the Sharpes odd or difficult; on the contrary they seemed relaxed and at home. Perhaps it was that the Sharpes took them for granted; accepting this invasion of strangers as if it were an every-day occurrence. Anyhow, Bill came and went on his ploys as if he had lived in the house for years; and Stanley put out his cup for a second helping without waiting to be asked. Involuntarily, Robert thought that Aunt Lin in their place would have been kind and fussy and they would have sat on the edge of the chairs and remembered their dirty overalls.

Perhaps it was the same taking-for-granted that had attracted Nevil.

"Do you plan to stay on here, ma'am?" the sergeant asked as they came in again.

"Certainly," Mrs. Sharpe said, pouring coffee for them.

"No," Robert said. "You mustn't, you really must not. I'll find you a quiet hotel in Larborough, where—"

"I never heard anything more absurd. Of course we are going to stay here. What do a few broken windows matter?"

"It may not stop at broken windows," the sergeant said. "And you're a great responsibility to us as long as you are here; a responsibility we haven't got the force to deal with."

"I'm truly sorry we are a nuisance to you, sergeant. We wouldn't have bricks flung at our windows if we could help it, believe me. But this is our home, and here we are staying. Quite apart from any question of ethics, how much of our home would be left to come back to if it was left empty? I take it if you are too short of men to guard human beings, you certainly have no men to guard empty property?"

The sergeant looked slightly abashed, as people so often did when Mrs. Sharpe dealt with them. "Well, there is that, ma'am," he acknowledged, with reluctance.

"And that, I think, disposes of any question of our leaving The Franchise. Sugar, sergeant?"

Robert returned to the subject when the police had taken their departure, and Bill had fetched a brush and shovel from the kitchen and was sweeping up the broken glass in room after room. Again he urged the wisdom of a hotel in Larborough but neither his emotion nor his common sense was behind the words. He would not have gone if he had been in the Sharpes' place, and he could not expect them to; and in addition he acknowledged the wisdom of Mrs. Sharpe's view about the fate of the house left empty.

"What you want is a lodger," said Stanley, who had been refused permission to sweep up glass because he was classed as walking-wounded. "A lodger with a pistol. What d'you say I come and sleep here of nights? No meals, just sleeping night watchman. They all sleep anyhow, night watchmen do."

It was evident by their expressions that both the Sharpes appreciated the fact that this was an open declaration of allegiance in what amounted to a local war; but they did not embarrass him with thanks.

"Haven't you got a wife?" Marion asked.

"Not of my own," Stanley said demurely.

"Your wife—if you had one—might support your sleeping here," Mrs. Sharpe pointed out, "but I doubt if your business would, Mr.—er—Mr. Peters."

"My business?"

"I imagine that if your customers found that you had become night watchman at The Franchise they would take their custom elsewhere."

"Not them," Stanley said comfortably. "There's nowhere else to take it. Lynch is drunk five nights out of seven, and Biggins wouldn't know how to put on a bicycle chain. Anyhow, I don't let my customers tell me what I do in my spare time."

And when Bill returned, he backed Stanley up. Bill was a much married man and it was not contemplated that he would ever sleep anywhere except at home. But that Stanley should sleep at The Franchise seemed to both of them a natural solution of the problem.

Robert was mightily relieved.

"Well," Marion said, "if you are going to be our guest at nights you might as well begin now. I am sure that head feels like a very painful turnip. I'll go and make up a bed. Do you prefer a south view?"

"Yes," said Stanley gravely. "Well away from kitchen and wireless noises."

"I'll do what I can."

It was arranged that Bill should slip a note into the door of Stanley's lodgings to say that he would be in for lunch as usual. "She won't worry about me," Stanley said, referring to his landlady. "I've been out for nights before now." He caught Marion's eye, and added: "Ferrying cars for customers; you can do it in half the time at night."

They tacked down the curtains in all the ground-floor rooms to provide some protection for their contents if it rained before morning, and Robert promised to get glaziers out at the earliest possible moment. Deciding privately to go to a Larborough firm, and not risk another series of polite rebuffs in Milford.

"And I shall also do something about a key for the gate, so that I can have a duplicate," he said as Marion came out with them to bar the gate, "and save you from being gate-keeper as well as everything else."

She put out her hand, to Bill first. "I shall never forget what you three have done for us. When I remember tonight it won't be these clods that I shall remember," she tilted her head to the windowless house, "but you three."

"Those clods were local, I suppose you know," Bill said as they drove home through the quiet spring night.

"Yes," Robert agreed. "I realised that. They had no car, for one thing. And 'Foreign bitches!' smells of the conservative country, just as 'Fascists!' smells of the progressive town."

Bill said some things about progress.

"I was wrong to let myself be persuaded yesterday evening. The man on the beat was so sure that 'everyone would go home when it grew dark' that I let myself believe it. But I should have remembered a warning I got about witch-hunts."

Bill was not listening. "It's a funny thing how unsafe you feel in a house without windows," he said. "Take a house with the back blown clean off, and not a door that will shut; you can live quite happily in a front room provided it still has windows. But without windows even a whole undamaged house feels unsafe."

Which was not an observation that provided Robert with any comfort.

I wonder if you would mind calling for the fish, dear," Aunt Lin said on the telephone on Tuesday afternoon. "Nevil is coming to dinner, and so we are going to have an extra course of what we were going to have for breakfast. I really don't see why we should have anything extra just for Nevil, but Christina says that it will keep him from making what she calls 'inroads' on the tart that is going to do again on her night-out tomorrow. So if you wouldn't mind, dear."

He was not looking forward greatly to an extra hour or two of Nevil's society, but he was feeling so pleased with himself that he was in a better humour to support it than usual. He had arranged with a Larborough firm for the replacement of the Franchise windows; he had miraculously unearthed a key that fitted the Franchise gate—and there would be two duplicates in existence by tomorrow; and he had personally taken out the groceries—together with an offering of the best flowers that Milford could supply. His welcome at The Franchise had been such that he had almost ceased to regret the lack of light exchanges on Nevil lines. There were, after all, other things than getting to Christian-name terms in the first half-hour.

In the lunch hour he had rung up Kevin Macdermott, and arranged with his secretary that when Kevin was free in the evening he would call him at 10 High Street. Things were getting out of hand, and he wanted Kevin's advice.

He had refused three invitations to golf, his excuse to his astounded cronies being that he had "no time to chase a piece of gutta-percha round a golf course."

He had gone to see an important client who had been trying to interview him since the previous Friday and who had been provoked into asking him on the telephone if "he still worked for Blair, Hayward, and Bennet."

He had got through his arrears of work with a mutely reproachful Mr. Heseltine; who, although he had allied himself on the Sharpe side, still obviously felt that the Franchise affair was not one for a firm like theirs to be mixed up in.

And he had been given tea by Miss Tuff out of the blue-patterned china on the lacquer tray covered by the fair white cloth and accompanied by two digestive biscuits on a plate.

It was lying on his desk now, the tea-tray; just as it had been a fortnight ago when the telephone had rung and he had lifted the receiver to hear Marion Sharpe's voice for the first time. Two short weeks ago. He had sat looking at it in its patch of sunlight, feeling uneasy about his comfortable life and conscious of time slipping past him. But today, the digestive biscuits held no reproach for him because he had stepped outside the routine they typified. He was on calling terms with Scotland Yard; he was agent for a pair of scandalous women; he had become an amateur sleuth; and he had been witness to mob violence. His whole world looked different. The dark skinny woman he used to see sometimes shopping in the High Street, for instance, had turned into Marion.

Well, one result of stepping out of a routined life was, of course, that you couldn't put on your hat and stroll home at four o'clock of an afternoon. He pushed the tea-tray out of his way, and went to work, and it was half-past six before he looked at the clock again, and seven before he opened the door of Number 10.

The sitting-room door was ajar as usual—like many doors in old houses it swung a little if left off the latch—and he could hear Nevil's voice in the room beyond.

"On the contrary, I think you are being extremely silly," Nevil was saying.

Robert recognised the tone at once. It was the cold rage with which a four-year-old Nevil had told a guest: "I am extremely sorry that I asked you to my party." Nevil must be very angry indeed about something.

With his coat half off Robert paused to listen.

"You are interfering in something you know nothing whatever about; you can hardly claim that is an intelligent proceeding. There was no other voice, so he must be talking to someone on the telephone; probably keeping Kevin from getting through, the young idiot.

"I am not infatuated with anyone. I never *have* been infatuated with anyone. It is you who are infatuated—with ideas. You are being extremely silly, as I said before. . . . You are taking the part of an unbalanced adolescent in a case you know nothing about; I should have thought that was sufficient evidence of infatuation. . . . You can tell your father from me that there is nothing Christian about it, just unwarranted interference. I'm not sure it isn't incitement to violence. . . . Yes, last night. . . . No, all their windows broken, and things painted on their walls If he is so interested in justice he might do something about that. But your lot are never interested in justice, are they? Only in injustice What do I mean by your lot? Just what I say. You and all your crowd who are for ever adopting good-for-nothings and championing them against the world. You wouldn't put out a finger to keep a hard-working little man from going down the drain, but let an old lag lack the price of a meal and your sobs can be heard in Antarctica. You make me sick Yes, I said you make me sick Cat-sick. Sick to my stomach. I retch!"

And the bang of the receiver on its rest indicated that the poet had said his say.

Robert hung up his coat in the cupboard and went in. Nevil with a face like thunder was pouring himself out a stiff whisky.

"I'll have one too," Robert said. "I couldn't help overhearing," he added. "That wasn't Rosemary, by any chance?"

"Who else? Is there anyone else in Britain capable of an ineffable silliness like that?"

"Like what?"

"Oh, didn't you hear that bit? She has taken up the cause of the persecuted Betty Kane." Nevil gulped some whisky, and glared at Robert as if Robert were responsible.

"Well, I don't suppose her stepping on the Ack-Emma bandwagon will have much effect one way or another."

"The Ack-Emmal It isn't the Āck-Ēmma. It's the Watchman. That mental deficient she calls father has written a letter about it for Friday's issue. Yes, you may well look squeamish. As if we weren't coping with enough without that highfalutin nugget of perverted sentimentality putting in its sixpenceworth!"

Remembering that the *Watchman* was the only paper ever to have published any of Nevil's poems, Robert thought this showed slight ingratitude. But he approved the description.

"Perhaps they won't print it," he said, less in hope than looking for comfort.

"You know very well they will print anything he chooses to send them. Whose money saved them just when they were going down for the third time? The Bishop's, of course."

"His wife's, you mean." The Bishop had married one of the two grand-daughters of Cowan's Cranberry Sauce.

"All right, his wife's. And the Bishop has the *Watchman* for a lay pulpit. And there isn't anything too silly for him to say in it, or too unlikely for them to print. Do you remember that girl who went round shooting taxi-drivers in cold blood for a profit of about seven-and-eleven a time? That girl was just his meat. He sobbed himself practically into a coma about her. He wrote a long heartbreaking letter about her in the *Watchman*, pointing out how underprivileged she had been, and how she had won a scholarship to a secondary school and hadn't been able to 'take it up' because her people were too poor to provide her with books or proper clothes, and so she had gone to blind-alley jobs and then to bad company—and so, it was inferred, to shooting taxi-drivers, though he didn't actually mention that little matter. Well, all the *Watchman* readers *labved* that, of course; it was just their cup of tea; all criminals according to the *Watchman* readers are frustrated angels. And then the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the school—the school she was supposed to have won a scholarship to—wrote to point out that so far from winning anything was she that her name was 159th out of two hundred competitors; and that someone as interested in education as the Bishop was should have known that no one was prevented from accepting a scholarship through lack of money, since in needy cases books and money grants were forthcoming automatically. Well, you would have thought that that would shake him, wouldn't you? But not a bit. They printed the Chairman's letter on a back page, in small print; and in the very next issue the old boy was sobbing over some other case that he knew nothing about. And on Friday, so help me, he'll be sobbing over Betty Kane."

"I wonder—if I went over to see him tomorrow—"

"It goes to press tomorrow."

"Yes, so it does. Perhaps if I telephoned—"

"If you think that anyone or anything will make His Lordship keep back a finished composition from the public gaze, you're being naïve."

The telephone rang.

"If that's Rosemary, I'm in China," Nevil said.

But it was Kevin Macdermott.

"Well, sleuth," said Kevin. "My congratulations. But next time don't waste an afternoon trying to ring up civilians in Aylesbury, when you can get the same information from Scotland Yard by return."

Robert said that he was still sufficiently civilian not to think in terms of Scotland Yard at all; but that he was learning; rapidly. He sketched the happenings of last night for Kevin's benefit, and said: "I can't afford to be leisurely about it any more. Something must be done as quickly as possible to clear them of this thing."

"You want me to give you the name of a private agent, is that it?"

"Yes, I suppose it has come to that. But I did wonder—"

"Wonder what?" Kevin asked, as he hesitated.

"Well, I did think of going to Grant at the Yard and saying quite frankly that I had found out how she could have known about the Sharpes and about the house; and that she had met a man in Larborough and that I had a witness of the meeting."

"So that they could do what?"

"So that they could investigate the girl's movements during that month instead of us."

"And you think they would?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"Because it wouldn't be worth their while. All they would do when they found out that she was not trustworthy would be to drop the case thankfully into oblivion. She has not sworn to anything so they could not prosecute her for perjury."

"They could proceed against her for having misled them."

"Yes, but it wouldn't be worth their while. It won't be easy to unearth her movements for that month, we may be sure. And on top of all that unnecessary investigation they would have the job of preparing and presenting a case. It's highly unlikely that an overworked department, with serious cases flooding in at their doors, are going to all that bother when they could quietly drop the thing on the spot."

"But it's supposed to be a department of Justice. It leaves the Sharpes—"

"No, a department of the Law. Justice begins in court. As you very well know. Besides, Rob, you haven't brought them any proof of anything. You don't know that she ever went to Milford. And the fact that she picked up a man at the Midland, and had tea with him, doesn't do anything to disprove her story that she was picked up by the Sharpes. In fact the only leg you have to stand on is Alec Ramsden, 5 Spring Gardens, Fulham. South West."

"Who is he?"

"Your private sleuth. And a very good one, take it from me. He has a flock of tame operators at call, so if he is busy himself he can supply you with a fairly good substitute. Tell him I gave you his name and he won't palm off a dud on you. Not that he would, anyhow. He's the salt of the earth. Pensioned from the Force because of a wound 'received in the course of duty.' He'll do you proud. I must go. If there's anything else I can do just give me a ring sometime. I wish I had time to come down and see

The Franchise and your witches for myself. They grow on me. Goodbye."

Robert laid down the receiver, picked it up again, asked for Information, and obtained the telephone number of Alec Ramsden. There was no answer and he sent a telegram saying that he, Robert Blair, needed some work done urgently and that Kevin Macdermott had said that Ramsden was the man to do it.

"Robert," said Aunt Lin coming in pink and indignant, "did you know that you left the fish on the hall table and it has soaked through to the mahogany and Christina was waiting for it."

"Is the gravamen of the charge the mahogany or keeping Christina waiting?"

"Really, Robert, I hardly know what's come over you. Since you got involved in this Franchise affair you've changed entirely. A fortnight ago you would never have dreamed of putting a parcel of fish down on polished mahogany and forgetting all about it. And if you had you would be sorry about it and apologise."

"I do apologise, Aunt Lin; I am truly contrite. But it is not often I am saddled with a responsibility as serious as the present one and you must forgive me if I am a little jaded."

"I don't think you are jaded at all. On the contrary, I have never seen you so pleased with yourself. I think you are positively *relishing* this sordid affair. Only this morning Miss True-love at the Anne Boleyn was condoling with me on your being mixed up in it."

"Was she indeed? Well, I condole with Miss Truelove's sister."

"Condole about what?"

"On having a sister like Miss Truelove. You are having a bad time, aren't you, Aunt Lin."

"Don't be sarcastic, dear. It is not pleasant for anyone in this town to see the notoriety that has overtaken it. It has always been a quiet and dignified little place."

"I don't like Milford as much as I did a fortnight ago," Robert said reflectively, "so I'll save my tears."

"No less than four separate charabancs arrived, from Larborough at one time or another today, having come for nothing but to inspect the Franchise *en route*."

"And who catered for them?" Robert asked, knowing that coach traffic was not welcome in Milford.

"No one. They were simply furious."

"That will larn them to go poking their noses. There is nothing Larborough minds about as much as its stomach."

"The vicar's wife insists on being Christian about it, but I think that that is the wrong point of view."

"Christian?"

"Yes; 'reserving our judgment,' you know. That is merely feebleness, not Christianity. Of course I don't discuss the case, Robert dear; even with her. I am the soul of discretion. But of course she knows how I feel, and I know how she feels, so discussion is hardly necessary."

What was clearly a snort came from Nevil where he was sunk in an easy chair.

"Did you say something, Nevil dear?"

The nursery tone clearly intimidated Nevil. "No, Aunt Lin," he said meekly.

But he was not going to escape so easily; the snort had only too clearly been a snort. "I don't grudge you the drink, dear, but is that your *third* whisky? There is a Traminer for dinner, and you won't taste it at all after that strong stuff. You mustn't get into bad habits if you are going to marry a Bishop's daughter."

"I am not going to marry Rosemary."

Miss Bennet stared, aghast. "Not!"

"I would as soon marry a Public Assistance Board."

"But, Nevil!"

"I would as soon marry a radio set." Robert remembered Kevin's remark about Rosemary giving birth to nothing but a gramophone record. "I would as soon marry a crocodile." Since Rosemary was very pretty Robert supposed that "crocodile" had something to do with tears. "I would as soon marry a soap-box." Marble Arch, Robert supposed. "I would as soon marry the Ack-Emma" That seemed to be final.

"But Nevil, dear, why!"

"She is a very silly creature. Almost as silly as the Watchman"

Robert heroically refrained from mentioning the fact that for the last six years the Watchman had been Nevil's bible.

"Oh, come, dear; you've had a tiff; all engaged couples do. It's a good thing to get the give-and-take business on a firm basis before marriage; those couples who never quarrel during their engagement lead surprisingly rowdy lives after marriage; so don't take a small disagreement too seriously. You can ring her up before you go home tonight—"

"It is a quite fundamental disagreement," Nevil said coldly. "And there is no prospect whatever of my ringing her up."

"But Nevil, dear, what—"

The three thin cracked notes of the gong floated through her protest and gave her pause. The drama of broken engagements gave place on the instant to more immediate concerns.

"That is the gong. I think you had better take your drink in with you, dear. Christina likes to serve the soup as soon as she has added the egg, and she is not in a very good mood tonight because of getting the fish so late. Though why that should make any difference to her I can't think. It is only grilled, and that doesn't take any time. It's not as if she had had to wipe the fish juice off the mahogany, because I did that myself."

It further upset Aunt Lin that Robert should have breakfast next morning at 7:45 so that he could go early to the office. It was another sign of the degeneration that the Franchise affair was responsible for. To have early breakfast so that he might catch a train, or set out for a distant meet, or attend a client's funeral, was one thing. But to have early breakfast just so that he could arrive at work at an office-boy hour was a very odd proceeding, and unbefitting a Blair.

Robert smiled, walking up the sunny High Street still shuttered and quiet. He had always liked the early morning hours, and it was at this hour that Milford looked its best; its pinks and sepias and creams as delicate in the sunlight as a tinted drawing. Spring was merging into summer, and already the warmth of the pavement radiated into the cool air; the pollarded limes were full out. That would mean shorter nights for the lonely women at The Franchise, he remembered thankfully. But perhaps—with any luck—by the time the summer was actually here their vindication would be complete and their home no longer a beleaguered fortress.

Propped against the still closed door of the office was a long thin grey man who seemed to be all bones and to have no stomach at all.

"Good-morning," Robert said. "Did you want to see me?"

"No," said the grey man. "You wanted to see me."

"I did?"

"At least so your telegram said. I take it you're Mr. Blair?"

"But you can't be here already!" Robert said.

"It's not far," the man said laconically.

"Come in," said Robert trying to live up to Mr. Ramsden's standard of economy in comment.

In the office he asked as he unlocked his desk: "Have you had breakfast?"

"Yes, I had bacon and eggs at the White Hart."

"I am wonderfully relieved that you could come yourself."

"I had just finished a case. And Kevin Macdermott has done a lot for me."

Yes; Kevin, for all his surface malice and his over-crowded life, found the will and the time to help those who deserved help. In which he differed markedly from the Bishop of Larborough, who preferred the undeserving.

"Perhaps the best way would be for you to read this statement," he said, handing Ramsden the copy of Betty Kane's statement to the police, "and then we can go on with the story from there."

Ramsden took the typescript, sat down in the visitors' chair—folded up would be a more accurate description of his action—and withdrew himself from Robert's presence very much as Kevin had done in the room in St. Paul's Churchyard. Robert, taking out his own work, envied them their power of concentration.

"Yes, Mr. Blair?" he said presently; and Robert gave him the rest of the story: the girl's identification of the house and its inmates, Robert's own entrance into the affair, the police decision that they would not proceed on the available evidence, Leslie Wynn's resentment and its result in the *Ack-Emma* publicity, his own interviews with the girl's relations and what they revealed, his discovery that she went bus-riding and that a double-decker did run on the Milford bus-route during the relevant weeks, and his unearthing of X.

"To find out more about X is your job, Mr. Ramsden. The lounge waiter, Albert, knows what he looked like, and this is a list of residents for the period in question. It would be too great luck that he should be staying at the Midland, but one never knows. After that you're on your own. Tell Albert I sent you, by the way. I've known him a long time."

"Very good. I'll get over to Larborough now. I'll have a photograph of the girl by tomorrow, but perhaps you could lend me your *Ack-Emma* one for today."

"Certainly. How are you going to get a proper photograph of her?"

"Oh. Wavs."

Robert deduced that Scotland Yard had been given one when the girl was reported missing, and that his old colleagues at Headquarters would not be too reluctant to give him a copy; so he left it at that.

"There's just a chance that the conductor of one of those double-decker buses may remember her," he said as Ramsden was going. "They are Larborough and District Motor Services buses. The garage is in Victoria Street."

At half-past nine the staff arrived—one of the first being Nevil; a change in routine which surprised Robert: Nevil was usually the last to arrive and the last to settle down. He would wander in, divest himself of his wrappings in his own small room at the back, wander into "the office" to say good morning, wander into the "waiting-room" at the back to say hello to Miss Tuff, and finally wander into Robert's room and stand there thumbing open the bound roll of one of the esoteric periodicals that came for him by post and commenting on the permanently deplorable state of affairs in England. Robert had grown quite used to running through his morning post to a Nevil obbligato. But today Nevil came in at the appointed time, went into his own room, shut the door firmly after him, and, if the pulling in and out of drawers was any evidence, settled down to work at once.

Miss Tuff came in with her notebook and her dazzling white peter-pan collar, and Robert's normal day had begun. Miss Tuff had worn peter-pan collars over her dark frock for twenty years, and would have looked undressed, almost indecent, without

them now. A fresh one went on every morning; the previous day's having been laundered the night before and laid ready for putting on tomorrow. The only break in the routine was on Sundays. Robert had once met Miss Tuff on a Sunday and entirely failed to recognise her because she was wearing a jabot.

Until half-past ten Robert worked, and then realised that he had had breakfast at an abnormally early hour and was now in need of more sustenance than an office cup of tea. He would go out and have coffee and a sandwich at the Rose and Crown. You got the best coffee in Milford at the Anne Boleyn, but it was always full of shopping females ("How nice to see you, my dear! We did miss you so at Ronnie's party! And have you heard . . . ") and that was an atmosphere he would not face for all the coffee in Brazil. He would go across to the Rose and Crown, and afterwards he would shop a little on behalf of the Franchise people, and after lunch he would go out and break to them gently the bad news about the Watchman. He could not do it on the telephone because they had no telephone now. The Larborough firm had come out with ladders and putty and recalcitrant sheets of glass and had replaced the windows without fuss or mess. But they, of course, were Private Enterprise. The Post Office, being a Government department, had taken the matter of the telephone into avizandum and would move in their own elephantine good time. So Robert planned to spend part of his afternoon telling the Sharpes the news he could not tell them by telephone.

It was still early for mid-morning snacks and the chintz and old oak of the Rose and Crown lounge was deserted except for Ben Carley, who was sitting by the gate-legged table at the window reading the *Ack-Emma*. Carley had never been Robert's cup-of-tea—any more than, he suspected, he was Carley's—but they had the bond of their profession (one of the strongest in human nature) and in a small place like Milford that made them very nearly bosom friends. So Robert sat down as a matter of course at Carley's table; remembering as he did so that he still owed Carley gratitude for that unheeded warning of his about the feeling in the countryside.

Carley lowered the *Ack-Emma* and regarded him and the too-lively dark eyes that were so alien in this English Midland serenity. "It seems to be dying down," he said. "Only one letter today; just to keep something in the kitty."

"The Ack-Emma, yes. But the Watchman is beginning a campaign of its own on Friday."

"The Watchman! What's it doing climbing into the Ack-Emma's bed?"

"It wouldn't be the first time," Robert said.

"No, I suppose not," Carley said, considering it. "Two sides of the same penny, when you come to think of it. Oh, well. That needn't worry you. The total circulation of the *Watchman* is about twenty thousand. If that."

"Perhaps. But practically every one of those twenty thousand has a second cousin in the permanent Civil Service in this country."

"So what? Has anyone ever known the permanent Civil Service to move a finger in any cause whatever outside their normal routine?"

"No, but they pass the buck. And sooner or later the buck drops into—into a—a—"

"A fertile spot," Carley offered, mixing the metaphor deliberately.

"Yes. Sooner or later some busybody or sentimentalist or egotist, with not enough to do, thinks that something should be done about this and begins to pull strings. And a string pulled in the Civil Service has the same effect as a string pulled in a peep-show. A whole series of figures is yanked into action, willy-nilly. Gerald obliges Tony, and Reggie obliges Gerald, and so on, to incalculable ends."

Carley was silent a moment. "It's a pity," he said. "Just when the *Ack-Emma* was losing way. Another two days and they would have dropped it for good. In fact they're two days over their normal schedule, as it is. I have never known them carry a subject longer than three issues. The response must have been terrific to warrant that amount of space."

"Yes," Robert agreed, gloomily.

"Of course, it was a gift for them. The beating of kidnapped girls is growing very rare. As a change of fare it was beyond price. When you have only three or four dishes, like the *Ack-Emma*, it's difficult to keep the customers' palates properly tickled. A tit-bit like the Franchise affair must have put up their circulation by thousands in the Larborough district alone."

"Their circulation will slack off. It's just a tide. But what I have to deal with is what's left on the beach."

"A particularly smelly beach, let me say," Carley observed. "Do you know that fat blonde with the mauve powder and the uplift brassiere who runs the Sports Wear shop next the Anne Boleyn? She's one of the things on your beach."

"How?"

"She lived at the same boarding-house in London as the Sharpes, it seems; and she has a lovely story as to how Marion Sharpe once beat a dog half to death in a rage. Her clients loved that story. So did the Anne Boleyn customers. She goes there for her morning coffee." He glanced wryly at the angry flush on Robert's face. "I needn't tell you that she has a dog of her own. It has never been corrected in its spoiled life, but it is rapidly dying of fatty degeneration through the indiscriminate feeding of morsels whenever the fat blonde is feeling gooey."

There were moments, Robert thought, when he could very nearly hug Ben Carley, striped suits and all.

"Ah, well, it will blow over," said Carley, with the pliant philosophy of a race long used to lying low and letting the storm blow past.

Robert looked surprised. Forty generations of protesting ancestors were surprised in his sole person. "I don't see that blowing over is any advantage," he said. "It won't help my clients at all."

"What can you do?"

"Fight, of course."

"Fight what? You wouldn't get a slander verdict, if that's what you're thinking of."

"No. I hadn't thought of slander. I propose to find out what the girl was really doing during those weeks."

Carley looked amused. "Just like that" he said, commenting on this simple statement of a tall order.

"It won't be easy and it will probably cost them all they have, but there is no alternative."

"They could go away from here. Sell the house and settle down somewhere else. A year from now no one outside the Milford

district will remember anything about this affair."

"They would never do that; and I shouldn't advise them to, even if they would. You can't have a tin can tied to your tail and go through life pretending it isn't there. Besides, it is quite unthinkable that that girl should be allowed to get away with her tale. It's a matter of principle."

"You can pay too high a price for your damned principles. But I wish you luck, anyhow. Are you considering a private inquiry agent? Because if you are I know a very good—"

Robert said that he had got an agent and that he was already at work.

Carley's expressive face conveyed his amused congratulation at this swift action on the part of the conservative Blair, Hayward, and Bennet.

"The Yard had better look to its laurels," he said. His eyes went to the street beyond the leaded panes of the window, and the amusement in them faded to a fixed attention. He stared for a moment or two and then said softly: "Well! of all the nerve!"

It was an admiring phrase, not an indignant one; and Robert turned to see what was occasioning his admiration. On the opposite side of the street was the Sharpes' battered old car; its odd front wheel well in evidence. And in the back, enthroned in her usual place and with her usual air of faint protest at this means of transport, was Mrs. Sharpe. The car was pulled up outside the grocer's and Marion was presumably inside shopping. It could have been there only a few moments or Ben Carley would have noticed it before, but already two errand boys had paused to stare, leaning on their bicycles with voluptuous satisfaction in this free spectacle. And even while Robert took in the scene people came to the doors of neighbouring shops as the news flew from mouth to mouth.

"What incredible folly!" Robert said angrily.

"Folly nothing," said Carley, his eyes on the picture. "I wish they were clients of mine."

He fumbled in his pocket for change to pay for his coffee, and Robert fled from the room. He reached the near side of the car just as Marion came out on to the pavement at the other side. "Mrs. Sharpe," he said sternly, "this is an extraordinarily silly thing to do. You are only exacerbating—"

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Blair," she said, in polite social tones. "Have you had your morning coffee, or would you like to accompany us to the Anne Boleyn?"

"Miss Sharpe!" he said appealing to Marion, who was putting her packages down on the seat. "You must know that this is a silly thing to do."

"I honestly don't know whether it is or not," she said, "but it seems to be something that we must do. Perhaps we have grown childish with living too much to ourselves, but we found that neither of us could forget that snub at the Anne Boleyn. That condemnation without trial."

"We suffer from spiritual indigestion, Mr. Blair. And the only cure is a hair of the dog that bit us. To wit a cup of Miss True-love's excellent coffee."

"But it is so unnecessary! So-"

"We feel that at half-past ten in the morning there must be a large number of free tables at the Anne Boleyn," Mrs. Sharpe said tartly.

"Don't worry, Mr. Blair," Marion said. "It is a gesture only. Once we have drunk our token cup of coffee at the Anne Boleyn we shall never darken its doors again." She burlesqued the phrase in characteristic fashion.

"But it will merely provide Milford with a free—"

Mrs. Sharpe caught him up before he could utter the word. "Milford must get used to us as a spectacle," she said dryly, "since we have decided that living entirely within four walls is not something that we can contemplate."

"But-"

"They will soon grow used to seeing monsters and take us for granted again. If you see a giraffe once a year it remains a spectacle; if you see it daily it becomes part of the scenery. We propose to become part of the Milford scenery."

"Very well, you plan to become part of the scenery. But do one thing for me just now." Already the curtains of first-floor windows were being drawn aside and faces appearing. "Give up the Anne Boleyn plan—give it up for today at least—and have your coffee with me at the Rose and Crown."

"Mr. Blair, coffee with you at the Rose and Crown would be delightful, but it would do nothing to relieve my spiritual indigestion, which, in the popular phrase, 'is killing me.' "

"Miss Sharpe, I appeal to you. You have said that you realise that you are probably being childish, and—well, as a personal obligation to me as your agent, I ask you not to go on with the Anne Boleyn plan."

"That is blackmail," Mrs. Sharpe remarked.

"It is unanswerable, anyhow," Marion said, smiling faintly at him. "We seem to be going to have coffee at the Rose and Crown." She sighed. "Just when I was all strung up for a gesture!"

"Well, of all the nerve!" came a voice from overhead. It was Carley's phrase over again but held none of Carley's admiration; it was loaded with indignation.

"You can't leave the car here," Robert said. "Quite apart from the traffic laws it is practically Exhibit A."

"Oh, we didn't intend to," Marion said. "We were taking it round to the garage so that Stanley can do something technical to its inside with some instrument he has there. He is exceedingly scornful about our car, Stanley is."

"I dare say. Well, I shall go round with you; and you had better step on it before we are run in for attracting a crowd."

"Poor Mr. Blair," Marion said, pressing the starter. "It must be horrid for you not to be part of the landscape any more, after all those years of comfortable merging."

She said it without malice—indeed there was genuine sympathy in her voice—but the sentence stuck in his mind and made a small tender place there as they drove round into Sin Lane, avoided five hacks and a pony that were trailing temperamentally out of the livery stable, and came to rest in the dimness of the garage.

Bill came out to meet them, wiping his hands on an oily rag. "Morning, Mrs. Sharpe. Glad to see you out. Morning, Miss Sharpe. That was a neat job you did on Stan's forehead. The edges closed as neat as if they had been stitched. You ought to have been a nurse."

"Not me. I have no patience with people's fads. But I might have been a surgeon. You can't be very faddy on the operating table."

Stanley appeared from the back, ignoring the two women who now ranked as intimates, and took over the car. "What time do you want this wreck?" he asked.

"An hour do?" Marion asked.

"A year wouldn't do, but I'll do all that can be done in an hour." His eye went on to Robert. "Anything for the Guineas?"

"I've had a good tip for Bali Boogie."

"Nonsense," old Mrs. Sharpe said. "None of that Hippocras blood were any good when it came to a struggle. Just turned it up."

The three men stared at her, astonished.

"You are interested in racing?" Robert said, unbelieving.

"No, in horseflesh. My brother bred thoroughbreds." Seeing their faces she gave her dry cackle of laughter, so like a hen's squawk. "Did you think I went to rest every afternoon with my Bible, Mr. Blair? Or perhaps with a book on black magic. No, indeed; I take the racing page of the daily paper. And Stanley would be well advised to save his money on Bali Boogie; if anything in horseflesh ever deserved so obscene a name that animal does."

"And what instead?" Stanley asked, with his usual economy.

"They say that horse sense is the instinct that keeps horses from betting on men. But if you must do something as silly as betting, then you had better put your money on Kominsky."

"Kominsky!" Stanley said. "But it's at sixties!"

"You can of course lose your money at a shorter price if you like," she said dryly. "Shall we go, Mr. Blair?"

"All right," Stan said. "Kominsky it is; and you're on to a tenth of my stake."

They walked back to the Rose and Crown; and as they emerged from the comparative privacy of Sin Lane into the open street Robert had the exposed feeling that being out in a bad air-raid used to give him. All the attention and all the venom in the uneasy night seemed to be concentrated on his shrinking person. So now in the bright early-summer sunlight he crossed the street feeling naked and unprotected. He was ashamed to see how relaxed and seemingly indifferent Marion swung along at his side, and hoped that his self-consciousness was not apparent. He talked as naturally as he could, but he remembered how easily her mind had always read the contents of his, and felt that he was not making a very good job of it.

A solitary waiter was picking up the shilling that Ben Carley had left on the table, but otherwise the lounge was deserted. As they seated themselves round the bowl of wall-flowers on the black oak table Marion said: "You heard that our windows are in again?"

"Yes; P. C. Newsam looked in on his way home last night to tell me. That was smart work."

"Did you bribe them?" Mrs. Sharpe asked.

"No. I just mentioned that it was the work of hooligans. If your missing windows had been the result of blast you would no doubt still be living with the elements. Blast ranks as misfortune, and therefore a thing to be put up with. But hooliganism is one of those things that Something Must Be Done About. Hence your new windows. I wish that it was all as easy as replacing windows."

He was unaware that there had been any change in his voice, but Marion searched his face and said: "Some new development?"

"I'm afraid there is. I was coming out this afternoon to tell you about it. It appears that just when the *Ack-Emma* is dropping the subject—there is only one letter today and that a mild one—just when the *Ack-Emma* has grown tired of Betty Kane's cause the *Watchman* is going to take it up."

"Excelsior!" said Marion. "The Watchman snatching the torch from the failing hands of the Ack-Emma is a charming picture."

"Climbing into the Ack-Emma's bed," Ben Carley had called it; but the sentiment was the same.

"Have you spies in the Watchman office, Mr. Blair?"

Mrs. Sharpe asked.

"No; it was Nevil who got wind of it. They are going to print a letter from his future father-in-law, the Bishop of Larborough."

"Hah!" said Mrs. Sharpe. "Toby Byrne."

"You know him?" asked Robert, thinking that the quality of her tone would peel the varnish off wood if spilt on it.

"He went to school with my nephew. The son of the horseleech brother. Toby Byrne, indeed. He doesn't change."

"I gather that you didn't like him."

"I never knew him. He went home for the holidays once with my nephew but was never asked back."

"Oh?"

"He discovered for the first time that stable lads got up at the crack of dawn, and he was horrified. It was slavery, he said; and he went round the lads urging them to stand up for their rights. If they combined, he said, not a horse would go out of the stable before nine o'clock in the morning. The lads used to mimic him for years afterwards; but he was not asked back."

"Yes; he doesn't change," agreed Robert. "He has been using the same technique ever since, on everything from Kaffirs to Crèches. The less he knows about a thing the more strongly he feels about it. Nevil was of the opinion that nothing could be done about the proposed letter, since the Bishop had already written it and what the Bishop has written is not to be contemplated as waste-paper. But I couldn't just sit and do nothing about it, so I rang him up after dinner and pointed out as

tactfully as I could that he was embracing a very doubtful cause, and at the same time doing harm to two possibly innocent people. But I might have saved my breath. He pointed out that the *Watchman* existed for the free expression of opinion, and inferred that I was trying to prevent such freedom. I ended up by asking him if he approved of lynching, because he was doing his best to bring one about. That was after I saw it was hopeless and had stopped being tactful." He took the cup of coffee that Mrs. Sharpe had put out for him. "He's a sad come-down after his predecessor in the See who was the terror of every evil-doer in five counties, and a scholar to boot."

"How did Toby Byrne achieve gaiters?" Mrs. Sharpe wondered.

"I assume that Cowan's Cranberry Sauce had no inconsiderable part in his translation."

"Ah, yes. His wife. I forgot. Sugar, Mr. Blair?"

"By the way, here are the two duplicate keys to the Franchise gate. I take it that I may keep one. The other you had better give to the police, I think, so that they can look round as they please. I also have to inform you that you now have a private agent in your employ." And he told them about Alec Ramsden, who appeared on doorsteps at half-past eight in the morning.

"No word of anyone recognising the Ack-Emma photograph and writing to Scotland Yard?" Marion asked. "I had pinned my faith to that."

"Not so far. But there is still hope."

"It is five days since the Ack-Emma printed it. If anyone was ever going to recognise it they would have by now."

"You don't make allowances for the discards. That is nearly always the way it happens. Someone spreads open their parcel of chips and says: 'Dear me, where did I see that face?' Or someone is using a bundle of newspapers to line drawers in a hotel. Or something like that. Don't lose hope, Miss Sharpe. Between the good Lord and Alec Ramsden, we'll triumph in the end."

She looked at him soberly. "You really believe that don't you," she said as one noting a phenomenon.

"I do," he said.

"You believe in the ultimate triumph of Good."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I suppose because the other thing is unthinkable. Nothing more positive or more commendable than that."

"I should have a greater faith in a God who hadn't given Toby Byrne a bishopric," Mrs. Sharpe said. "When does Toby's letter appear, by the way?"

"On Friday morning."

"I can hardly wait," said Mrs. Sharpe.

Robert was less sure about the ultimate triumph of good by Friday afternoon.

It was not the Bishop's letter which shook his faith. Indeed the events of Friday did much to take the wind out of the Bishop's sails; and if Robert had been told on Wednesday morning that he would bitterly regret anything that served to deflate the Bishop he would not have believed it.

His Lordship's letter had run very true to form. The *Watchman*, he said, had always set its face against violence and was not now, of course, proposing to condone it, but there were occasions when violence was but a symptom of a deep social unrest, resentment, and insecurity. As in the recent Nullahbad case, for instance. (The "unrest, resentment, and insecurity" in the Nullahbad case lay entirely in the bosoms of two thieves who could not find the opal bracelet they had come to steal and by way of reprisal killed the seven sleeping occupants of the bungalow in their beds.) There were undoubtedly times when the proletariat felt themselves helpless to redress a patent wrong, and it was not to be marvelled at that some of the more passionate spirits were moved to personal protest. (Robert thought that Bill and Stanley would hardly recognise the louts of Monday night under the guise of "passionate spirits"; and he held that "personal protest" was a slight understatement for the entire wrecking of the ground floor windows of The Franchise.) The people to be blamed for the unrest (the *Watchman* had a passion for euphemism: unrest, underprivileged, backward, unfortunate; where the rest of the world talked about violence, the poor, mentally deficient, and prostitutes; and one of the things that the *Ack-Emma* and the *Watchman* had in common, now he thought about it, was the belief that all prostitutes were hearts-of-gold who had taken the wrong turning)—the people to be blamed for the unrest were not those perhaps misguided persons who had demonstrated their resentment so unmistakably, but the powers whose weakness, ineptitude and lack of zeal had led to the injustice of a dropped case. It was part of the English heritage that justice should not only be done but that it should be shown to be done; and the place for that was in open court.

"What good does he think it would do anyone for the police to waste time preparing a case that they were foreordained to lose?" Robert asked Nevil, who was reading the letter over his shoulder.

"It would have done us a power of good," Nevil said. "He doesn't seem to have thought of that. If the Magistrate dismissed the case the suggestion that his poor bruised darling was telling fibs could hardly be avoided, could it! Have you come to the bruises?"

"No."

The bruises came near the end. The "poor bruised body" of this young and blameless girl, his lordship said, was a crying indictment of a law that had failed to protect her and now failed to vindicate her. The whole conduct of this case was one that demanded the most searching scrutiny.

"That must be making the Yard very happy this morning," Robert said.

"This afternoon," amended Nevil.

"Why this afternoon?"

"No one at the Yard would read a bogus publication like the *Watchman*. They won't see it until someone sends it to them this afternoon."

But they had seen it, as it turned out. Grant had read it in the train. He had picked it off the bookstall with three others; not because it was his choice but because it was a choice between that and coloured publications with bathing-belle covers.

Robert deserted the office and took the copy of the *Watchman* out to The Franchise together with that morning's *Ack-Emma*, which had quite definitely no further interest in the Franchise affair. Since the final, subdued letter on Wednesday it had ceased to mention the matter. It was a lovely day; the grass in the Franchise courtyard absurdly green, the dirty-white front of the house glorified by the sun into a semblance of grace, the reflected light from the rosy brick wall flooding the shabby drawing-room and giving it a smiling warmth. They had sat there, the three of them, in great contentment. The *Ack-Emma* had finished its undressing of them in public; the Bishop's letter was not after all as bad as it might have been; Alec Ramsden was busy on their behalf in Larborough and would without doubt unearth facts sooner or later that would be their salvation; the summer was here with its bright short nights; Stanley was proving himself "a great dear"; they had paid a second short visit to Milford yesterday in pursuance of their design to become part of the scenery, and nothing untoward had happened to them beyond stares, black looks, and a few audible remarks. Altogether, the feeling of the meeting was that it all might be worse.

"How much ice will this cut?" Mrs. Sharpe asked Robert, stabbing her skinny index finger at the correspondence page of the Watchman.

"Not much, I think. Even among the *Watchman* clique the Bishop is looked at slightly sideways nowadays, I understand. His championship of Mahoney didn't do him any good."

"Who was Mahoney?" Marion asked.

"Have you forgotten Mahoney? He was the Irish 'patriot' who put a bomb in a woman's bicycle basket in a busy English street and blew four people to pieces, including the woman, who was later identified by her wedding ring. The Bishop held that Mahoney was merely misguided, not a murderer; that he was fighting on behalf of a repressed minority—the Irish, believe it or not—and that we should not make him into a martyr. That was a little too much for even *Watchman* stomachs, and since then the Bishop's prestige is not what it was, I hear."

"Isn't it shocking how one forgets when it doesn't concern oneself," Marion said. "Did they hang Mahoney?"

"They did, I am glad to say—much to his own pained surprise. So many of his predecessors had benefited from the plea that we should not make martyrs, that murder had ceased to be reckoned in their minds as one of the dangerous trades. It was rapidly becoming as safe as banking."

"Talking of banking," Mrs. Sharpe said, "I think it would be best if our financial position were made clear to you, and for that you should get in touch with old Mr. Crowle's solicitors in London, who manage our affairs. I shall write to them explaining that you are to be given full details, so that you may know how much we have to come and go on, and can make corresponding arrangements for the spending of it in defence of our good name. It is not exactly the way we had planned to spend it."

"Let us be thankful we have it to spend," Marion said. "What does a penniless person do in a case like this?"

Robert quite frankly did not know.

He took the address of the Crowle solicitors and went home to lunch with Aunt Lin, feeling happier than he had at any time since he had first caught sight of the *Ack-Emma's* front page on Bill's desk last Friday. He felt as one feels in a bad thunderstorm when the noise ceases to be directly overhead; it will still continue, and probably still be very unpleasant, but one can see a future through it whereas but a moment ago there was nothing but the dreadful "now."

Even Aunt Lin seemed to have forgotten The Franchise for a spell and was at her woolly and endearing best—full of the birthday presents she was buying for Lettice's twins in Saskatchewan. She had provided his favourite lunch—cold ham, boiled potatoes, and brown betty with thick cream—and moment by moment he was finding it more difficult to realise that this was the Friday morning he had dreaded because it would see the beginning of a *Watchman* campaign against them. It seemed to him that the Bishop of Larborough was very much what Lettice's husband used to call "a busted flush." He couldn't imagine now why he had wasted a thought on him.

It was in this mood that he went back to the office. And it was in this mood that he picked up the receiver to answer Hallam's call.

"Mr. Blair?" Hallam said. "I'm at the Rose and Crown. I'm afraid I've got bad news for you. Inspector Grant's here."

"At the Rose and Crown?"

"Yes. And he's got a warrant."

Robert's brain stopped functioning. "A search warrant?" he asked stupidly.

"No; a warrant to arrest."

"No!"

"I'm afraid so."

"But he can't have!"

"I expect it's a bit of a shock for you. I admit I hadn't anticipated it myself."

"You mean he has managed to get a witness—a corroborative witness?"

"He has two of them. The case is sewn up and tied with ribbon."

"I can't believe it."

"Will you come over, or shall we go to you? I expect you'll want to come out with us."

"But where? Oh, yes. Yes, of course I shall. I'll come over to the Rose and Crown now. Where are you? In the lounge?"

"No, in Grant's bedroom. Number Five. The one with the casement window on the street—over the bar."

"All right. I'm coming straight over. I say!"

"Yes?"

"A warrant for both?"

"Yes. For two."

"All right. Thank you. I'll be with you in a moment."

He sat for a moment getting back his breath, and trying to orientate himself. Nevil was out on business, but Nevil was not much of a moral support at any time. He got up, took his hat, and went to the door of "the office."

"Mr. Heseltine, please," he said, in the polite formula always used in the presence of the younger staff; and the old man followed him into the hall and out to the sunlit doorway.

"Timmy," Robert said. "We're in trouble. Inspector Grant is here from Headquarters with a warrant to arrest the Franchise people." Even as he said the words he could not believe that the thing was really happening.

Neither could old Mr. Heseltine; that was obvious. He stared, wordless; his pale old eyes aghast.

"It's a bit of a shock, isn't it, Timmy?" He shouldn't have hoped for support from the frail old clerk.

But shocked as he was, and frail, and old, Mr. Heseltine was nevertheless a law clerk, and the support was forthcoming. After a lifetime among formulae his mind reacted automatically to the letter of the situation.

"A warrant," he said. "Why a warrant?"

"Because they can't arrest anyone without one," Robert said a trifle impatiently. Was old Timmy getting past his work?

"I don't mean that. I mean, it's a misdemeanour they're accused of, not a felony. They could surely make it a summons, Mr. Robert? They don't need to *arrest* them, surely? Not for a misdemeanour."

Robert had not thought of that. "A summons to appear," he said. "Yes, why not? Of course there's nothing to hinder them arresting them if they want to."

"But why should they want to? People like the Sharpes wouldn't run away. Nor do any farther harm while they are waiting to appear. Who issued the warrant, did they say?"

"No, they didn't say. Many thanks, Timmy; you've been as good as a stiff drink. I must go over to the Rose and Crown now—Inspector Grant is there with Hallam—and face the music. There's no way of warning The Franchise because they have no telephone. I'll just have to go out there with Grant and Hallam hanging round my neck. And only this morning we were beginning to see daylight, so we thought. You might tell Nevil when he comes in, will you? And stop him doing anything

foolish or impulsive."

"You know very well Mr. Robert, I've never been able to stop Mr. Nevil doing anything he wanted to do. Though it has seemed to me that he has been surprisingly sober this last week. In the metaphorical sense, I mean."

"Long may it last," Robert said, stepping out into the sunlit street.

It was the dead period of the afternoon at the Rose and Crown and he passed through the hall and up the wide shallow stairs without meeting anyone, and knocked at the door of Number Five. Grant, calm and polite as always, let him in. Hallam, vaguely unhappy-looking, was leaning against the dressing-table in the window.

"I understand that you hadn't expected this, Mr. Blair," Grant said.

"No, I hadn't. To be frank, it is a great shock to me."

"Sit down," Grant said. "I don't want to hurry you."

"You have new evidence, Inspector Hallam says."

"Yes; what we think is conclusive evidence."

"May I know what it is?"

"Certainly. We have a man who saw Betty Kane being picked up by the car at the bus stop—"

"By a car," Robert said.

"Yes, if you like, by a car—but its description fits that of the Sharpes'."

"So do ten thousand others in Britain. And?"

"The girl from the farm, who went once a week to help clean The Franchise, will swear that she heard screams coming from the attic."

"Went once a week? Doesn't she go any longer?"

"Not since the Kane affair became common gossip."

"I see '

"Not very valuable pieces of evidence in themselves, but very valuable as proof of the girl's story. For instance she really did miss that Larborough-London coach. Our witness says that it passed him about half a mile down the road. When he came in sight of the bus-stop a few moments later the girl was there waiting. It is a long straight road, the main London road through Mainshill—"

"I know. I know it."

"Yes; well, when he was still some way from the girl he saw the car stop by her, saw her get in, and saw her driven away."

"But not who drove the car?"

"No. It was too far away for that."

"And this girl from the farm—did she volunteer the information about the screaming?"

"Not to us. She spoke about it to her friends, and we acted on information, and found her quite willing to repeat the story on oath."

"Did she speak about it to her friends before the gossip about Betty Kane's abduction got round?"

"Yes."

That was unexpected, and Robert was rocked back on his heels. If that was really true—that the girl had mentioned screaming before there was any question of the Sharpes being in trouble—then the evidence would be damning. Robert got up and walked restlessly to the window and back. He thought enviously of Ben Carley. Ben wouldn't be hating this as he hated it, feeling inadequate and at a loss. Ben would be in his element; his mind delighting in the problem and in the hope of outwitting established authority. Robert was dimly aware that his own deep-seated respect for established authority was a handicap to him rather than an asset; he needed some of Ben's native belief that authority is there to be circumvented.

"Well, thank you for being so frank," he said at last. "Now, I'm not minimising the crime you are accusing these people of, but it is misdemeanour not felony, so why a warrant? Surely a summons would meet the case perfectly?"

"A summons would be in order certainly," Grant said smoothly. "But in cases where the crime is aggravated—and my superiors take a grave view of the present one—a warrant is issued."

Robert could not help wondering how much the gadfly attentions of the *Ack-Emma* had influenced the calm judgments of the Yard. He caught Grant's eye and knew that Grant had read his thought.

"The girl was missing for a whole month—all but a day or two," Grant said, "and had been very badly knocked about, very deliberately. It is not a case to be taken lightly."

"But what do you gain from arrest?" Robert asked, remembering Mr. Heseltine's point. "There is no question of these people not being there to answer the charge. Nor any question of a similar crime being committed by them in the interval. When did you want them to appear, by the way?"

"I planned to bring them up at the police court on Monday."

"Then I suggest that you serve them with a summons to appear."

"My superiors have decided on a warrant," Grant said, without emotion.

"But you could use your judgment. Your superiors can have no knowledge of local conditions, for instance. If The Franchise is left without occupants it will be a wreck in a week. Have your superiors thought of that? And if you arrest these women, you can only keep them in custody until Monday, when I shall ask for bail. It seems a pity to risk hooliganism at The Franchise just for the gesture of arrest. And I know Inspector Hallam has no men to spare for its protection."

This right-and-left gave them both pause. It was amazing how ingrained the respect for property was in the English soul; the first change in Grant's face had occurred at the mention of the possible wrecking of the house. Robert cast an unexpectedly kind thought to the louts who had provided the precedent, and so weighted his argument with example. As for Hallam, quite apart from his limited force he was not likely to look kindly on the prospect of fresh hooliganism in his district and fresh culprits to track down.

Into the long pause Hallam said tentatively: "There is something in what Mr. Blair says. Feeling in the countryside is very strong, and I doubt if they would leave the house untouched if it was empty. Especially if news of the arrest got about."

It took nearly half an hour to convince Grant, however. For some reason there was a personal element in the affair for Grant, and Robert could not imagine what it could be, or why it should be there.

"Well," the Inspector said at length, "you don't need me to serve a summons." It was as if a surgeon was contemptuous at being asked to open a boil, Robert thought, amused and vastly relieved. "I'll leave that to Hallam and get back to town. But I'll be in court on Monday. I understand that the Assizes are imminent, so if we avoid a remand the case can go straight on to the Assizes. Can you be ready with your defence by Monday, do you think?"

"Inspector, with all the defence my clients have we could be ready by tea-time," Robert said bitterly.

To his surprise, Grant turned to him with a broader smile than was usual with him; and it was a very kind smile. "Mr. Blair," he said, "you have done me out of an arrest this afternoon, but I don't hold it against you. On the contrary, I think your clients are luckier than they deserve in their solicitor. It will be my prayer that they are less lucky in their counsel! Otherwise, I may find myself talked into voting them a testimonial."

So it was not with "Grant and Hallam hanging round his neck" that Robert went out to The Franchise; not with a warrant at all. He went out in Hallam's familiar car with a summons sticking out of the pocket of it; and he was sick with relief when he thought of the escape they had had, and sick with apprehension when he thought of the fix they were in.

"Inspector Grant seemed to have a very personal interest in executing that warrant," he said to Hallam as they went along. "Is it that the *Ack-Emma* has been biting him, do you think?"

"Oh, no," Hallam said. "Grant's as nearly indifferent to that sort of thing as a human being can be."

"Then why?"

"Well, it's my belief—strictly between ourselves—that he can't forgive them for fooling him. The Sharpes, I mean. He's famous at the Yard for his good judgment of people, you see; and, again between ourselves, he didn't much care for the Kane girl or her story; and he liked them even less when he had seen the Franchise people, in spite of all the evidence. Now he thinks the wool was pulled over his eyes, and he's not taking it lightly. It would have given him a lot of pleasure, I imagine, to produce that warrant in their drawing-room."

As they pulled up by the Franchise gate and Robert took out his key, Hallam said: "If you open both sides I'll drive the car inside, even for the short time. No need to advertise the fact that we're here." And Robert, pushing open the solid iron leaves, thought that when visiting actresses said "Your policemen are wonderful" they didn't know the half of it. He got back into the car and Hallam drove up the short straight drive and round the circular path to the door. As Robert got out of the car Marion came round the corner of the house, wearing gardening gloves and a very old skirt. Where her hair was blown up from her forehead by the wind it changed from the heavy dark stuff that it was to a soft smoke. The first summer sun had darkened her skin and she looked more than ever like a gipsy. Coming on Robert unexpectedly she had not time to guard her expression, and the lighting of her whole face as she saw him made his heart turn over.

"How nice!" she said. "Mother is still resting but she will be down soon and we can have some tea. I—" Her glance went to Hallam and her voice died away uncertainly. "Good afternoon, Inspector."

"Good afternoon, Miss Sharpe. I'm sorry to break into your mother's rest, but perhaps you would ask her to come down. It's important."

She paused a moment, and then led the way indoors. "Yes, certainly. Has there been some—some new development? Come in and sit down." She led them into the drawing-room that he knew so well by now—the lovely mirror, the dreadful fireplace, the bead-work chair, the good "pieces," the old pink carpet faded to a dirty grey—and stood there, searching their faces, savouring the new threat in the atmosphere.

"What is it?" she asked Robert.

But Hallam said: "I think it would be easier if you fetched Mrs. Sharpe and I told you both at the same time." "Yes. Yes, of course," she agreed, and turned to go. But there was no need to go. Mrs. Sharpe came into the room, very much as she had on that previous occasion when Hallam and Robert had been there together: her short strands of white hair standing on end where they had been pushed up by her pillow, her seagull's eyes bright and inquiring.

"Only two kinds of people," she said, "arrive in noiseless cars. Millionaires and the police. Since we have no acquaintances among the former—and an ever-widening acquaintance with the latter—I deduced that some of *our* acquaintances had arrived."

"I'm afraid I'm even less welcome than usual, Mrs. Sharpe. I've come to serve a summons on you and Miss Sharpe."

"A summons?" Marion said, puzzled.

"A summons to appear at the police court on Monday morning to answer a charge of abduction and assault." It was obvious that Hallam was not happy.

"I don't believe it," Marion said slowly. "I don't believe it. You mean you are charging us with this thing?"

"Yes, Miss Sharpe."

"But how? Why now?" She turned to Robert.

"The police think they have the corroborative evidence they needed," Robert said.

"What evidence?" Mrs. Sharpe asked, reacting for the first time.

"I think the best plan would be for Inspector Hallam to serve you both with the summonses, and we can discuss the situation at greater length when he has gone."

"You mean, we have to accept them?" Marion said. "To appear in the public court—my mother too—to answer a—to be accused of a thing like that?"

"I'm afraid there is no alternative."

She seemed half intimidated by his shortness, half resentful at his lack of championship. And Hallam, as he handed the document to her, seemed to be aware of this last and to resent it in his turn.

"And I think I ought to tell you, in case he doesn't, that but for Mr. Blair here it wouldn't be a mere summons, it would be a warrant; and you would be sleeping tonight in a cell instead of in your own beds. Don't bother, Miss Sharpe: I'll let myself out."

And Robert, watching him go and remembering how Mrs. Sharpe had snubbed him on his first appearance in that room, thought that the score was now game all.

"Is that true?" Mrs. Sharpe asked.

"Perfectly true," Robert said; and told them about Grant's arrival to arrest them. "But it isn't me you have to thank for your escape: it is old Mr. Heseltine in the office." And he described how the old clerk's mind reacted automatically to stimulus of a legal sort.

"And what is this new evidence they think they have?"

"They have it all right," Robert said dryly. "There is no thinking about it." He told them about the girl being picked up on the London road through Mainshill. "That merely corroborates what we have always suspected: that when she left Cherrill Street, ostensibly on her way home, she was keeping an appointment. But the other piece of evidence is much more serious. You told me once that you had a woman—a girl—from the farm, who came in one day a week and cleaned for you."

"Rose Glyn, yes."

"I understand that since the gossip got round she doesn't come anymore."

"Since the gossip—? You mean, the Betty Kane story? Oh, she was sacked before that ever came to light."

"Sacked?" Robert said sharply.

"Yes. Why do you look so surprised? In our experience of domestic workers sacking is not an unexpected occurrence."

"No, but in this case it might explain a lot. What did you sack her for?"

"Stealing," said old Mrs. Sharpe.

"She had always lifted a shilling or two from a purse if it was left round," supplemented Marion, "but because we needed help so badly we turned a blind eye and kept purses out of her way. Also any small liftable articles, like stockings. And then she took the watch I'd had for twenty years. I had taken it off to wash some things—the soap-suds rise up one's arms, you know—and when I went back to look for it it had gone. I asked her about it, but of course she 'hadn't seen it.' That was too much. That watch was part of me, as much a part of me as my hair or my fingernails. There was no recovering it, because we had no evidence at all that she had taken it. But after she had gone we talked it over and next morning we walked over to the farm, and just mentioned that we would not be needing her any more. That was a Tuesday—she always came on Mondays—and that afternoon after my mother had gone up to rest Inspector Grant arrived, with Betty Kane in the car."

"I see. Was anyone else there when you told the girl at the farm that she was sacked?"

"I don't remember. I don't think so. She doesn't belong to the farm—to Staples, I mean; they are delightful people. She is one of the labourer's daughters. And as far as I remember we met her outside their cottage and just mentioned the thing in passing."

"How did she take it?"

"She got very pink and flounced a bit."

"She grew beetroot red and bridled like a turkeycock," Mrs. Sharpe said. "Why do you ask?"

"Because she will say on oath that when she was working here she heard screams coming from your attic."

"Will she indeed," said Mrs. Sharpe, contemplatively.

"What is much worse, there is evidence that she mentioned the screams before there was any rumour of the Betty Kane

This produced a complete silence. Once more Robert was aware how noiseless the house was, how dead. Even the French clock on the mantelpiece was silent. The curtain at the window moved inwards on a gust of air and fell back to its place as soundlessly as if it were moving in a film.

"That," said Marion at last, "is what is known as a facer."

"Yes. Definitely."

"A facer for you, too."

"For us, yes."

"I don't mean professionally."

"No? How then?"

"You are faced with the possibility that we have been lying."

"Really, Marion!" he said impatiently, using her name for the first time and not noticing that he had used it. "What I am faced with, if anything, is the choice between your word and the word of Rose Glyn's friends.'

But she did not appear to be listening. "I wish," she said passionately, "oh, how I wish that we had one small, just one small piece of evidence on our side! She gets away—that girl gets away with everything, everything. We keep on saying It is not true,' but we have no way of showing that it is not true. It is all negative. All inconclusive. All feeble denial. Things combine to back up her lies, but nothing happens to help prove that we are telling the truth. Nothing!"

"Sit down, Marion," her mother said. "A tantrum won't improve the situation."

"I could kill that girl; I could kill her. My God, I could torture her twice a day for a year and then begin again on New Year's day. When I think what she had done to us I-"

"Don't think," Robert interrupted. "Think instead of the day when she is discredited in open court. If I know anything of human nature that will hurt Miss Kane a great deal worse than the beating someone gave her." "You still believe that that is possible?" Marion said, incredulous.

"Yes. I don't quite know how we shall bring it about. But that we shall bring it about I do believe."

"With not one tiny piece of evidence for us, not one; and evidence just—just blossoming for her?"

"Yes. Even then."

"Is that just native optimism, Mr. Blair," Mrs. Sharpe asked, "or your innate belief in the triumph of Good, or what?"

"I don't know. I think Truth has a validity of its own."

"Dreyfus didn't find it very valid; nor Slater; nor some others of whom there is record," she said dryly.

"They did in the end."

"Well, frankly, I don't look forward to a life in prison waiting for Truth to demonstrate its validity."

"I don't believe that it will come to that. Prison, I mean. You will have to appear on Monday, and since we have no adequate defence you will no doubt be sent for trial. But we shall ask for bail, and that means that you can go on staying here until the Assizes at Norton. And before that I hope that Alec Ramsden will have picked up the girl's trail. Remember we don't even have to know what she was doing for the rest of the month. All we have to show is that she did something else on the day she says you picked her up. Take away that first bit and her whole story collapses. And it is my ambition to take it away in public."

"To undress her in public the way the Ack-Emma has undressed us? Do you think she would mind?" Marion said. "Mind as we minded?"

"To have been the heroine of a newspaper sensation, to say nothing of the adored centre of a loving and sympathetic family, and then to be uncovered to the public gaze as a liar, a cheat and a wanton? I think she would mind. And there is one thing she would mind particularly. One result of her escapade was that she got back Leslie Wynn's attention; the attention she had lost when he became engaged. As long as she is a wronged heroine she is assured of that attention; once we show her up she has lost it for good."

"I never thought to see the milk of human kindness so curdled in your gentle veins, Mr. Blair," Mrs. Sharpe remarked.

"If she had broken out as a result of the boy's engagement—as she very well might—I should have nothing but pity for her. She is at an unstable age, and his engagement must have been a shock. But I don't think that had very much to do with it. I think she is her mother's daughter; and was merely setting out a little early on the road her mother took. As selfish, as self-indulgent, as greedy, as plausible as the blood she came of. Now I must go. I said that I would be at home after five o'clock if Ramsden wanted to ring up to report. And I want to ring Kevin Macdermott and get his help about counsel and things."

"I'm afraid that we—that I, rather—have been rather ungracious about this," Marion said. "You have done, and are doing, so much for us. But it was such a shock. So entirely unexpected and out of the blue. You must forgive me if—"

"There is nothing to forgive. I think you have both taken it very well. Have you got someone in the place of the dishonest and about-to-commit-perjury Rose? You can't have this huge place entirely on your hands."

"Well, no one in the locality would come, of course. But Stanley—what would we do without Stanley?—Stanley knows a woman in Larborough who might be interested to come out by bus once a week. You know, when the thought of that girl becomes too much for me, I think of Stanley."

"Yes," Robert said, smiling. "The salt of the earth."

"He is even teaching me how to cook. I know how to turn eggs in the frying-pan without breaking them now. 'D'you have to go at them as if you were conducting the Philharmonic?' he asked me. And when I asked him how he got so neat-handed he said it was with 'cooking in a bivvy two feet square.' "

"How are you going to get back to Milford?" Mrs. Sharpe asked.

"The afternoon bus from Larborough will pick me up. No word of your telephone being repaired, I suppose?"

Both women took the question as comment not interrogation. Mrs. Sharpe took leave of him in the drawing-room, but Marion walked to the gate with him. As they crossed the circle of grass enclosed by the branching driveway, he remarked: "It's a good thing you haven't a large family or there would be a worn track across the grass to the door."

"There is that as it is," she said, looking at the darker line in the rough grass. "It is more than human nature could bear to walk round that unnecessary curve."

Small talk, he was thinking; small talk. Idle words to cover up a stark situation. He had sounded very brave and fine about the validity of Truth, but how much was mere sound? What were the odds on Ramsden's turning up evidence in time for the court on Monday? In time for the Assizes? Long odds against, wasn't it? And he had better grow used to the thought.

At half-past five Ramsden rang up to give him the promised report; and it was one of unqualified failure. It was the girl he was looking for, of course; having failed to identify the man as a resident at the Midland, and having therefore no information at all about him. But nowhere had he found even a trace of her. His own men had been given duplicates of the photograph and with them had made inquiries at the airports, the railway termini, travel agencies, and the more likely hotels. No one claimed to have seen her. He himself had combed Larborough, and was slightly cheered to find that the photograph he had been given was at least easily recognisable, since it had been ready identified at the places where Betty Kane had actually been. At the two main picture houses, for instance—where, according to the box-office girls' information, she had always been alone—and at the ladies' cloakroom of the bus-station. He had tried the garages, but had drawn blank.

"Yes," Robert said. "He picked her up at the bus-stop on the London road through Mainshill. Where she would normally have gone to catch her coach home." And he told Ramsden of the new developments. "So things really are urgent now. They are being brought up on Monday. If only we could prove what she did that first evening. That would bring her whole story crashing down."

"What kind of car was it?" Ramsden asked.

Robert described it, and Ramsden sighed audibly over the telephone.

"Yes," Robert agreed. "A rough ten thousand of them between London and Carlisle. Well, I'll leave you to it. I want to ring up Kevin Macdermott and tell him our woes."

Kevin was not in chambers, nor yet at the flat in St. Paul's Churchyard, and Robert eventually ran him to earth at his home near Weybridge. He sounded relaxed and amiable, and was instantly attentive when he heard the news that the police had got their evidence. He listened without remark while Robert poured out the story to him.

"So you see, Kevin," Robert finished, "we're in a frightful jam.

"A schoolboy description," Kevin said, "but exquisitely accurate. My advice to you is to 'give' them the police court, and concentrate on the Assizes."

"Kevin, couldn't you come down for the week-end, and let me talk about it to you? It's six years, Aunt Lin was saying yesterday, since you spent a night with us so you're overdue anyhow. Couldn't you?"

"I promised Sean I'd take him over to Newbury on Sunday to choose a pony."

"But couldn't you postpone it? I'm sure Sean wouldn't mind if he knew it was in a good cause."

"Sean," said his doting parent, "has never taken the slightest interest in any cause that was not to his own immediate advantage. Being a chip off the old block. If I came would you introduce me to your witches?"

"But of course."

"And would Christina make me some butter tarts?"

"Assuredly."

"And could I have the room with the text in wools?"

"Kevin, you'll come?"

"Well, it's a damned dull country, Milford, except in the winter"—this was a reference to hunting, Kevin's only eye for country being from the back of a horse—"and I was looking forward to a Sunday riding on the downs. But a combination of witches, butter tarts, and a bedroom with a text in wools is no small draw."

As he was about to hang up, Kevin paused and said: "Oh, I say, Rob?"

"Yes?" Robert said, and waited.

"Have you considered the possibility that the police have the right of it?"

"You mean, that the girl's absurd tale may be true?"

"Yes. Are you keeping that in mind—as a possibility, I mean?"

"If I were I shouldn't—" Robert began angrily, and then laughed. "Come down and see them," he said.

"I come, I come," Kevin assured him, and hung up.

Robert called the garage, and when Bill answered asked if Stanley was still there.

"It's a wonder you can't hear him from where you are," Bill said.

"What's wrong?"

"We've just been rescuing that bay pony of Matt Ellis's from our inspection pit. Did you want Stan?"

"Not to speak to. Would you be very kind and ask him to pick up a note for Mrs. Sharpe on his way past tonight?"

"Yes, certainly. I say, Mr. Blair, is it true that there is fresh trouble coming about the Franchise affair—or should I ask that?" Milford! thought Robert. How did they do it? A sort of information-pollen blown on the wind?

"Yes, I'm afraid there is," he said. "I expect they'll tell Stanley about it when he goes out tonight. Don't let him forget about the note, will you?"

"No, that's all right."

He wrote to The Franchise to say that Kevin Macdermott was coming down for Saturday night and could he bring him out to see them on Sunday afternoon before he left to go back to town?

Does Kevin Macdermott *have* to look like a tout when he comes to the country?" Nevil asked, the following evening as he and Robert waited for the guest to finish his ablutions and come down to dinner.

What Kevin in country clothes actually looked like, Robert considered, was a rather disreputable trainer of jumpers for the smaller meetings; but he refrained from saying that to Nevil. Remembering the clothes that Nevil had startled the countryside with for the last few years, he felt that Nevil was in no position to criticise anyone's taste. Nevil had turned up to dinner in a chaste dark grey suit of the most irreproachable orthodoxy, and seemed to think that his new conformity made him free to forget the experimentalism of his immediate past.

"I suppose Christina is in the usual lather of sentiment?"

"A lather of white of egg, as far as I have been able to judge."

Christina regarded Kevin as "Satan in person," and adored him. His Satanic qualities came not from his looks—though Kevin did indeed look a little like Satan—but from the fact that he "defended the wicked for the sake of worldly gain." And she adored him because he was good-looking, and a possibly reclaimable sinner, and because he praised her baking.

"I hope it's a soufflé, then, and not that meringue stuff. Do you think that Macdermott could be lured into coming down to defend them at Norton Assizes?"

"I think he is much too busy for that, even if he were interested. But I'm hoping that one of his dogs-bodies will come."

"Primed by Macdermott."

"That's the idea."

"I really don't see why Marion should have to slave to provide Macdermott with lunch. Does he realise that she has to prepare and clear away and wash up every single thing, to say nothing of carting them to and fro a day's journey to that antediluvian kitchen?"

"It was Marion's own idea that he should come to lunch with them. I take it that she considers the extra trouble worth while."

"Oh, you were always crazy about Kevin; and you simply don't know how to begin to appreciate a woman like Marion. It's—it's *obscene* that she should be wasting her vitality on household drudgery, a woman like that. She should be hacking her way through jungles, or scaling precipices, or ruling a barbarous race, or measuring the planets. Ten thousand nit-wit blondes dripping with mink have nothing to do but sit back and have the polish on their predatory nails changed, and Marion carts coal. Coal! *Marion!* And I suppose by the time this case is finished they won't have a penny to pay a maid even if they could get one."

"Let us hope that by the time this case is finished they are not doing hard labour by order."

"Robert, it couldn't come to that! It's unthinkable."

"Yes, it's unthinkable. I suppose it is always unbelievable that anyone one knows should go to prison."

"It's bad enough that they should go into the dock. Marion. Who never did a cruel, or underhand, or shabby thing in her life. And just because a—Do you know, I had a lovely time the other night. I found a book on torture, and I stayed awake till two o'clock choosing which one I would use on the Kane."

"You should get together with Marion. That is her ambition too."

"And what would yours be?" There was a faint hint of scorn in the tone, as though it was understood that the mild Robert would have no strong feelings on the subject. "Or haven't you considered it?"

"I don't need to consider it," Robert said slowly. "I'm going to undress her in public."

"What!"

"Not that way. I'm going to strip her of every rag of pretence, in open court, so that everyone will see her for what she is."

Nevil looked curiously at him for a moment. "Amen," he said quietly. "I didn't know you felt like that about it, Robert." He was going to add something, but the door opened and Macdermott came in, and the evening had begun.

Eating solidly through Aunt Lin's superb dinner, Robert hoped that it was not going to be a mistake to take Kevin to Sunday lunch at The Franchise. He was desperately anxious that the Sharpes should make a success with Kevin; and there was no denying that Kevin was temperamental and the Sharpes not everyone's cup of tea. Was lunch at The Franchise likely to be an asset to their cause? A lunch cooked by Marion? For Kevin who was a gourmet? When he had first read the invitation—handed in by Stanley this morning—he was glad that they had made the gesture, but misgiving was slowly growing in him. And as one perfection succeeded the other in unhurried procession across Aunt Lin's shining mahogany, with Christina's large face hovering in eager benevolence beyond the candlelight, the misgiving swelled until it took entire possession of him. "Shapes that did not stand up" might fill his breast with a warm, protective affection; but they could hardly be expected to have the same effect on Kevin.

At least Kevin seemed glad to be here, he thought, listening to Macdermott making open love to Aunt Lin, with a word thrown to Christina every now and then to keep her happy and faithful. Dear Heaven, the Irish! Nevil was on his best behaviour, full of earnest attention, with a discreet "sir" thrown in now and again; often enough to make Kevin feel superior but not often enough to make him feel old. The subtler English form of flattery, in fact. Aunt Lin was like a girl, pink-cheeked and radiant; absorbing flattery like a sponge, subjecting it to some chemical process, and pouring it out again as charm. Listening to her talk Robert was amused to find that the Sharpes had suffered a sea-change in her mind. By the mere fact of being in danger

of imprisonment, they had been promoted from "these people" to "poor things." This had nothing to do with Kevin's presence; it was a combination of native kindness and woolly thinking.

It was odd, Robert thought, looking round the table, that this family party—so gay, so warm, so secure—should be occasioned by the dire need of two helpless women in that dark silent house set down among the endless fields.

He went to bed with the warm aura of the party still round him, but in his heart a chill anxiety and an ache. Were they asleep out there at The Franchise? How much sleep had they had lately?

He lay long awake, and wakened early; listening to the Sunday morning silence. Hoping that it would be a good day—The Franchise looked its worst in rain, when its dirty-white became almost grey—and that whatever Marion made for lunch would "stand up." Just before eight o'clock a car came in from the country and stopped below the window, and someone whistled a soft bugle call. A company call, it was. B Company. Stanley, presumably. He got up and put his head out of the window.

Stanley, hatless as usual—he had never seen Stanley in any kind of head covering—was sitting in the car regarding him with tolerant benevolence.

"You Sunday snoozers," said Stanley.

"Did you get me up just to sneer at me?"

"No. I have a message from Miss Sharpe. She says when you come out you're to take Betty Kane's statement with you, and you're on no account to forget it because it's of the first importance. I'll say it's important! She's going round looking as if she had unearthed a million."

"Looking happy!" Robert said, unbelieving.

"Like a bride. Indeed I haven't seen a woman look like that since my cousin Beulah married her Pole. A face like a scone, Beulah has; and believe me that day she looked like Venus, Cleopatra, and Helen of Troy rolled into one."

"Do you know what it is that Miss Sharpe is so happy about?"

"No. I did cast out a few feelers, but she's saving it up, it seems. Anyhow, don't forget the copy of the statement, or the responses won't come right, or something. The password's in the statement."

Stanley proceeded on his way up the street towards Sin Lane, and Robert took his towel and went to the bathroom greatly puzzled. While he waited for breakfast he looked out the statement from among the papers in his despatch case, and read it through again with a new attention. What had Marion remembered or discovered that was making her so happy? Betty Kane had slipped somewhere, that was obvious. Marion was radiant, and Marion wanted him to bring the Kane statement when he came. That could only mean that somewhere in the statement was proof that Betty Kane was lying.

He reached the end of the statement without finding any likely sentence and began to hunt through it again. What could it be? That she had said it was raining, and that it—perhaps—had not been raining? But that would not have been vital, or even important to the credibility of her story. The Milford bus, then? The one she said she had passed, when being driven in the Sharpes' car. Were the times wrong? But they had checked the times long ago, and they fitted nearly enough. The "lighted sign" on the bus? Was the time too early for a sign to be lighted? But that would have been merely a slip of memory, not a discrediting factor in her statement.

He hoped passionately that Marion in her anxiety to obtain that "one small piece of evidence" on their side was not exaggerating some trifling discrepancy into proof of dishonesty. The descent from hope would be worse than no hope at all.

This real worry almost obliterated the social worry of the lunch from his mind, and he ceased to care greatly whether Kevin enjoyed his meal at The Franchise or not. When Aunt Lin said to him, covertly, as she set off for church: "What do you think they'll give you for lunch, dear? I'm quite sure they live on those toasted flake things out of packets, poor things," he said shortly: "They know good wine when they taste it; that should please Kevin."

"What has happened to young Bennet?" Kevin asked as they drove out to The Franchise.

"He wasn't asked to lunch," Robert said.

"I didn't mean that. What has happened to the strident suits and the superiority and the Watchman aggressiveness?"

"Oh, he has fallen out with the Watchman over this case."

"Ah!"

"For the first time he is in a position to have actual personal knowledge of a case the *Watchman* is pontificating about, and it has been a bit of a shock to him, I think."

"Is the reformation going to last?"

"Well, do you know, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it did. Apart from the fact that he has got to an age when they normally give up childish things, and was due for a change, I think he has been doing some revision and wondering if any of the other *Watchman* white-headed boys were any more worthy of championing than Betty Kane. Kotovich, for instance."

"Hah! The patriot!" Kevin said expressively.

"Yes. Only last week he was holding forth on our duty to Kotovich; our duty to protect and cherish him—and eventually provide him with a British passport, I suppose. I doubt if today he would be quite so simple. He has grown up wonderfully in the last few days. I didn't know he even possessed a suit like the one he was wearing last night. It must be one he got to go to his school prize-giving in, for he certainly has worn nothing so sober since."

"I hope for your sake it lasts. He has brains, the boy; and once he got rid of his circus tricks would be an asset to the firm."

"Aunt Lin is distressed because he has split with Rosemary over the Franchise affair, and she is afraid he won't marry a bishop's daughter after all."

"Hooray! More power to him. I begin to like the boy. You put a few wedges into that split, Rob—casual-like—and see that he marries some nice stupid English girl who will give him five children and give the rest of the neighbourhood tennis parties between showers on Saturday afternoons. It's a much nicer kind of stupidity than standing up on platforms and holding forth on subjects you don't know the first thing about. Is this the place?"

"Yes, this is The Franchise."

"A perfect 'mystery house.' "

"It wasn't a mystery house when it was built. The gates, as you can see, were scroll work—rather nice work, too—so that the whole place was visible from the road. It was the simple operation of backing the gate with the iron sheeting that converted the house from something quite ordinary to something rather secret."

"A perfect house for Betty Kane's purpose anyhow. What a piece of luck for her that she remembered it."

Robert was to feel guilty afterwards that he had not had greater faith in Marion; both over the matter of Betty Kane's statement and over the lunch. He should have remembered how cool-minded she was, how analytic; and he should have remembered the Sharpe gift for taking people as they found them and its soothing effect on the persons concerned. The Sharpes had made no effort to live up to Aunt Lin's standards of hospitality; no effort to provide a formal dining-room lunch. They had set a table for four in the window of the drawing-room where the sun fell on it. It was a cherrywood table, very pleasant in grain but sadly needing polishing. The wine glasses, on the other hand, were polished to a diamond brilliance. (How like Marion, he thought, to concentrate on the thing that mattered and to ignore mere appearance.)

"The dining-room is an incredibly gloomy place," Mrs. Sharpe said. "Come and see it, Mr. Macdermott."

That too was typical. No sitting round with their sherry making small talk. Come and see our horrible dining-room. And the visitor was part of the household before he knew it.

"Tell me," Robert said to Marion as they were left alone, "what is this about the—"

"No, I am not going to talk about it until after lunch. It is to be your liqueur. It is a piece of the most astonishing luck that I should have thought of it last night, when Mr. Macdermott was coming to lunch today. It makes everything quite different. It won't stop the case, I suppose, but it does make everything different for us. It is the 'small thing' that I was praying for to be evidence for us. Have you told Mr. Macdermott?"

"About your message. No, I haven't said anything. I thought it better—not to."

"Robert!" she said looking at him with a quizzical amusement. "You didn't trust me. You were afraid I was havering."

"I was afraid you might be building more on a small foundation than—than it would hold. I—"

"Don't be afraid," she said, reassuringly. "It will hold. Would you like to come to the kitchen and carry the tray of soup for me?"

They had even managed the service without fuss or flurry. Robert carried the tray with four flat bowls of soup, and Marion came after him with a large dish under a Sheffield plate cover, and that seemed to be all. When they had drunk their soup, Marion put the large dish in front of her mother, and a bottle of wine in front of Kevin. The dish was a pot-au-feu chicken with all its vegetables round it; and the wine was a Montrachet.

"A Montrachet!" Kevin said. "You wonderful woman."

"Robert told us you were a claret lover," Marion said, "but what is left in old Mr. Crowle's cellar is long past its best. So it was a choice between that and a very heavy red burgundy that is wonderful on winter evenings but not so good with one of the Staples' fowls on a summer day."

Kevin said something about how seldom it was that women were interested in anything that did not bubble, or alternatively explode.

"To be frank," Mrs. Sharpe said, "if these parcels had been saleable we should probably have sold them, but we were exceedingly glad that they were too scrappy and varied for that. I was brought up to appreciate wine. My husband had a fairly good cellar, though his palate was not as good as mine. But my brother at Lessways had a better one, and a fine palate to match."

"Lessways?" Kevin said, and looked at her as if searching for a resemblance. "You're not Charlie Meredith's sister, are you?"

"I am. Did you know Charles? But you couldn't. You are too young."

"The first pony I ever had of my own was bred by Charlie Meredith," Kevin said. "I had him for seven years and he never put a foot wrong."

And after that, of course, both of them ceased to take any further interest in the others, and not over-much in the food.

Robert caught Marion's amused and congratulatory glance at him, and said: "You did yourself grave injustice when you said you couldn't cook."

"If you were a woman you would observe that I have not cooked anything. The soup I emptied out of a can, heated it, and added some sherry and flavouring; the fowl I put into a pot just as it came from Staples, poured some boiling water over it, added everything I could think of and left it on the stove with a prayer; the cream cheese also came from the farm."

"And the wonderful rolls to go with the cream cheese?"

"Stanley's landlady made those."

They laughed a little together, quietly.

Tomorrow she was going into the dock. Tomorrow she was going to be a public spectacle for the delight of Milford. But today her life was still her own, and she could share amusement with him; could be content with the hour. Or so it seemed if her shining eyes were any evidence.

They took the cheese plates from under the noses of the other two, who did not even pause in their conversation to remark the action, carried the trays of dirty dishes away to the kitchen and made the coffee there. It was a great gloomy place with a floor of stone slabs, and an old-fashioned sink that depressed him at sight.

"We put the range on only on Mondays when the scrubbing is done," Marion said, seeing his interest in the place. "Otherwise we cook on the little oil stove."

He thought of the hot water that ran so instantly into the shining bath when he turned the tap this morning, and was ashamed. He could hardly visualise, after his long years of soft living, an existence where one's bathing was done in water that was heated over an oil burner.

"Your friend is a charmer, isn't he," she said, pouring the hot coffee into its jug. "A little Mephistophelian—one would be

terribly afraid of him as opposing counsel—but a charmer."

"It's the Irish," Robert said, gloomily. "It comes as natural to them as breathing. Us poor Saxons plod along our brutish way and wonder how they do it."

She had turned to give him the tray to carry, and so was facing him with their hands almost touching. "The Saxons have the two qualities that I value most in this world. Two qualities that explain why they have inherited the earth. Kindness and dependability—or tolerance and responsibility, if you prefer the terms. Two qualities the Celt never had; which is why the Irish have inherited nothing but squabbles. Oh damn, I forgot the cream. Wait a moment. It's keeping cold in the wash-house." She came back with the cream and said, mock rustic: "I have heard tell as how there's things called refrigerators in some folks' houses now, but we don't need none."

And as he carried the coffee to the sunlight of the drawing-room he visualised the bone-chilling cold of those kitchen quarters in winter with no roaring range as there had been in the palmy days of the house when a cook had lorded it over half a dozen servants and you ordered coal by the wagon load. He longed to take Marion away from the place. Where he would take her he did not quite know—his own home was filled with the aura of Aunt Lin. It would have to be a place where there was nothing to polish and nothing to carry and practically everything was done by pressing a button. He could not see Marion spending her old age in service to some pieces of mahogany.

As they drank their coffee he brought the conversation gently round to the possibility of their selling The Franchise at some time or other and buying a cottage somewhere.

"No one would buy the place," Marion said. "It is a white elephant. Not big enough for a school, too remote for flats, and too big for a family these days. It might make a good madhouse," she added, thoughtfully, her eyes on the high pink wall beyond the window; and Robert saw Kevin's glance flash over her and run away again. "It is quiet, at least. No trees to creak, or ivy to tap at the window-panes, or birds to go yap-yap-yap until you want to scream. It is a very peaceful place for tired nerves. Perhaps someone would consider it for that."

So she liked the silence; the stillness that had seemed to him so dead. It was perhaps what she had longed for in her London life of noise and elbowing and demands; her life of fret and cramped quarters. The big quiet ugly house had been a haven.

And now it was a haven no longer.

Some day—Oh-please-God-let-it-happen—some day he would strip Betty Kane for ever of credit and love.

"And now," Marion said, "you are invited to inspect the 'fatal attic.

"Yes," Kevin said, "I should be greatly interested to see the things that the girl professed to identify. All her statements seemed to me the result of logical guesses. Like the harder carpet on the second flight of stairs. Or the wooden commode—something that you would almost certainly find in a country house. Or the flat-topped trunk."

"Yes, it was rather terrifying at the time, the way she kept hitting on things we had—and I hadn't had time to gather my wits—it was only afterwards I saw how little she really had identified in her statement. And she did make one complete bloomer, only no one thought of it until last night. Have you got the statement, Robert?"

"Yes." He took it out of his pocket.

They had climbed, she and Robert and Macdermott, the last bare flight of stairs and she led them into the attic. "I came up here last night on my usual Saturday tour round the house with a mop. That is our solution to the housekeeping problem, in case you are interested. A good large mop well soaked in absorbent polish-stuff run over every floor once a week. It takes five minutes per room and keeps the dust at bay."

Kevin was poking round the room and inspecting the view from the window. "So this is the view she described," he said.

"Yes," Marion said, "that is the view she described. And if I remember the words of her statement, as I remembered them last night, correctly, then she said something that she can't—Robert, would you read the bit where she describes the view from the window?"

Robert looked up the relevant passage, and began to read. Kevin was bending slightly forward staring out of the little round window, and Marion was standing behind him, smiling faintly like a sibyl.

"'From the window of the attic,' "read Robert, "'I could see a high brick wall with a big iron gate in the middle of it. There was a road on the farther side of the wall, because I could see the telegraph posts. No, I couldn't see the traffic on it because the wall was too high. Just the tops of lorry loads sometimes. You couldn't see through the gate because it had sheets of iron on the inside. Inside the gate the carriage-way went straight for a little and then divided in two into a circle up to the door. No, it wasn't a garden, just—'"

"What!" yelled Kevin, straightening himself abruptly.

"What what?" Robert asked, startled.

"Read that last bit again, that bit about the carriage-way."

"'Inside the gate the carriage-way went straight for a little and then divided in two into a circle up to the—'"

Kevin's shout of laughter stopped him. It was an abrupt monosyllable of amused triumph.

"You see?" Marion said into the sudden silence.

"Yes," Kevin said softly, his pale bright eyes gloating on the view. "That was something she didn't reckon with."

Robert moved over as Marion gave way to let him have her place, and so saw what they were talking about. The edge of the roof with its small parapet cut off the view of the courtyard before the carriage-way branched at all. No one imprisoned in that room would know about the two half circles up to the doorway.

"You see," Marion said, "the Inspector read that description when we were all in the drawing-room. And all of us knew that the description was accurate. I mean, an accurate picture of what the courtyard is like; so we unconsciously treated it as something that was finished with. Even the Inspector. I remember his looking at the view from the window but it was quite an automatic gesture. It didn't occur to any of us that it would not have been as described. Indeed, except for one tiny detail it was as described."

"Except for one tiny detail," Kevin said. "She arrived in darkness and fled in darkness, and she says she was locked in the room all the time, so she could have known nothing of that branching drive. What does she say, again, about her arrival, Rob?" Robert looked it up and read:

"'The car stopped at last and the younger woman, the one with the black hair, got out and pushed open big double gates on to a drive. Then she got back in and drove the car up to a house. No, it was too dark to see what kind of a house, except that it had steps up to the door. No, I don't remember how many steps; four or five, I think. Yes, definitely a small flight of them.' And then she goes on about being taken to the kitchen for coffee."

"So," Kevin said. "And her account of her flight? What time of night was that?"

"Sometime after supper if I remember rightly," Robert said shuffling through the pages. "After dark, anyhow. Here it is." And he read:

"'When I got to the first landing, the one above the hall, I could hear them talking in the kitchen. There was no light in the hall. I went on down the last flight, expecting every moment that one of them would come out and catch me, and then made a dash for the door. It wasn't locked and I ran straight out and down the steps to the gate and out to the road. I ran along the road—yes, it was hard like a highroad—until I couldn't run any longer and I lay in the grass till I was feeling able to go on.'"

"'It was hard, like a highroad,' "Kevin quoted. "The inference being that it was too dark to see the surface she was running on."

There was a short silence.

"My mother thinks that this is enough to discredit her," Marion said. She looked from Robert to Kevin, and back again, without much hope. "But you don't, do you." It was hardly a question.

"No," Kevin said. "No. Not alone. She might wriggle out of it with a clever counsel's help. Might say that she had deduced the circle from the swing of the car when she arrived. What she would normally have deduced, of course, would be the ordinary carriage sweep. No one would spontaneously think of anything as awkward as that circular drive. It makes a pretty pattern, that's all—which is probably why she remembered it. I think this titbit should be kept as make-weight for the Assizes."

"Yes, I thought you would say that," Marion said. "I'm not really disappointed. I was glad about it, not because I thought that it would free us of the charge, but because it frees us of the doubt that must have—must have—" She stammered unexpectedly, avoiding Robert's eyes.

"Must have muddled our crystal minds," finished Kevin, briskly; and cast a glance of pleased malice at Robert. "How did you think of this last night when you came to sweep?"

"I don't know. I stood looking out of the window, and at the view she described, and wishing that we might have just one small tiny microscopic piece of evidence on *our* side. And then, without thinking, I heard Inspector Grant's voice reading that bit in the drawing-room. Most of the story he told us in his own words, you know. But the bits that brought him to The Franchise he read in the girl's words. I heard his voice—it's a nice voice—saying the bit about the circular carriage-way, and from where I was at that moment there was no circular carriage-way. Perhaps it was an answer to unspoken prayer."

"So you still think that we had best 'give' them tomorrow and bank everything on the Assizes?" Robert said.

"Yes. It makes no difference actually to Miss Sharpe and her mother. An appearance in one place is very like an appearance in another—except that the Assizes at Norton will probably be less unpleasant than a police court in one's home town. And the shorter their appearance tomorrow the better from their point of view. You have no evidence to put before the court tomorrow, so it should be a very short and formal affair. A parade of *their* evidence, an announcement that you reserve your defence, an application for bail, and *voilà!*"

This suited Robert well enough. He did not want to prolong tomorrow's ordeal for them; he had more confidence in any case in a judgment framed outside Milford; and most of all he did not want, now that it had come to a case, a half-decision, a dismissal. That would not be sufficient for his purpose where Betty Kane was concerned. He wanted the whole story of that month told in open court, in Betty Kane's presence. And by the time the Assizes opened at Norton, he would, please God, have the story ready to tell.

"Whom can we get to defend them?" he asked Kevin as they drove home to tea.

Kevin reached into a pocket, and Robert took it for granted that what he was looking for was a list of addresses. But what he produced was obviously an engagement book.

"What is the date of the Assizes at Norton, do you know?" he asked.

Robert told him, and held his breath.

"It's just possible that I might be able to come down myself. Let me see, let me see."

Robert let him see in complete silence. One word, he felt, might ruin the magic.

"Yes," Kevin said. "I don't see why I shouldn't—short of the unforeseen. I like your witches. It would give me great pleasure to defend them against that very nasty piece of work. How odd that she should be old Charlie Meredith's sister. One of the best, the old boy was. About the only approximately honest horse-coper known in history. I have never ceased to be grateful to him for that pony. A boy's first horse is very important. It colours his whole after-life; not only his attitude to horse-flesh; everything else as well. There is something in the trust and friendship that exists between a boy and a good horse that—"

Robert listened, relaxed and amused. He had realised, with a gentle irony untinged with any bitterness, that Kevin had given up any thought of the Sharpes' guilt long before the evidence of that view from the window was presented to him. It was not possible that old Charlie Meredith's sister could have abducted anyone.

It's a perpetual wonder to me," Ben Carley said, eyeing the well-populated benches in the little court, "how so many of the lieges have so little to do on a Monday morning. Though I must say it's some time since the gathering has had so much tone. Have you noticed the Sports Wear? Back row but one, in a yellow hat that doesn't go with her mauve powder or her hair. If she's left that little Godfrey girl in charge, she's going to be short of change tonight. I got that girl off when she was fifteen. She'd been swiping cash since she could walk and she's still swiping it. No female to be left alone with a till, believe me. And that Anne Boleyn woman. First time I've ever seen her in court. Though how she's avoided it so long I don't know. Her sister's for ever paying out cheques to cover her R.D. ones. No one's ever discovered what she does with the money. Someone blackmailing her, perhaps. I wonder who. I wouldn't put it past Arthur Wallis, at the White Hart. Three different orders to pay every week, and another on the way, just won't come out of a potman's pay."

Robert let Carley burble on without listening to him. He was only too conscious that the audience in court was not the usual Monday morning collection of loafers putting off time until they opened. The news had gone round, by the mysterious Milford channels, and they had come to see the Sharpes charged. The normal drabness of the court was gay with women's clothes; and its normal drowsy silence sibilant with their chatter.

One face he saw which should have been hostile but was oddly friendly: that of Mrs. Wynn, whom he had last seen standing in her lovely little patch of garden in Meadowside Lane, Aylesbury. He could not think of Mrs. Wynn as an enemy. He liked her, admired her, and was sorry for her in advance. He would have liked to go over and say how d'you do to her, but the game had been laid out on the squares now and they were chequers of different colour.

Grant had not appeared so far, but Hallam was there, talking to the sergeant who had come to The Franchise the night the hooligans wrecked the windows.

"How's your sleuth doing?" Carley asked, during a pause in his running commentary.

"The sleuth's all right, but the problem is colossal," Robert said. "The proverbial needle just gives itself up by comparison."

"One girl against the world," mocked Ben. "I'm looking forward to seeing this floosie in the flesh. I suppose after all the fan mail she's had, and the offers of marriage, and the resemblance to Saint Bernadette, she'll think a country police court too small an arena for her. Did she have any stage offers?"

"I wouldn't know."

"I suppose Mama would repress them anyhow. That's her there with the brown suit, and she looks a very sensible woman to me. I can't think how she ever came to have a daughter like—. Oh, she was adopted, wasn't she? An Awful Warning. It's a constant wonder to me how little folk know about the people they live with. There was a woman over at Ham Green had a daughter that was never out of her sight as far as she knew, but daughter walked out in a pet one day and didn't come back and frantic mother goes howling to the police and police discover that the girl who has apparently never been away from mother for a night is a married woman with a child and has merely collected child and gone to live with husband. See police records if not believing Ben Carley. Ah, well, if you grow dissatisfied with your sleuth let me know and I'll give you the address of a very good one. Here we go."

He rose in deference to the Bench, while continuing a monologue on the Bench's complexion, possible temper, and probable occupation yesterday.

Three routine cases were disposed of; old offenders apparently so used to the procedure that they anticipated the drill, and Robert half expected someone to say "Wait for it, can't you!"

Then he saw Grant come in quietly and sit in an observer's position at the back of the Press bench, and he knew that the time had come.

They came in together when their names were called, and took their places in the horrid little pew as if they were merely taking their places in church. It was rather like that, he thought: the quiet, and observant eyes, and the suggestion of waiting for a performance to begin. But he suddenly realised what he would be feeling if it were Aunt Lin in Mrs. Sharpe's place, and was fully aware for the first time of what Marion must be suffering on her mother's behalf. Even if the Assizes saw them cleared of the charge, what would compensate them for what they had endured? What punishment fit Betty Kane's crime?

For Robert, being old-fashioned, believed in retribution. He might not go all the way with Moses—an eye was not always compensation for an eye—but he certainly agreed with Gilbert: the punishment should fit the crime. He certainly did not believe that a few quiet talks with the chaplain and a promise to reform made a criminal into a respect-worthy citizen. "Your true criminal," he remembered Kevin saying one night, after a long discussion on penal reform, "has two unvarying characteristics, and it is these two characteristics which make him a criminal. Monstrous vanity and colossal selfishness. And they are both as integral, as inerradicable, as the texture of the skin. You might as well talk of 'reforming' the colour of one's eyes."

"But," someone had objected, "there have been monsters of vanity and selfishness who were not criminal."

"Only because they have victimised their wives instead of their bank," Kevin had pointed out. "Tomes have been written trying to define the criminal, but it is a very simple definition after all. The criminal is a person who makes the satisfaction of his own immediate personal wants the mainspring of his actions. You can't cure him of his egotism, but you can make the indulgence of it not worth his while. Or almost not worth his while."

Kevin's idea of prison reform, Robert remembered, was deportation to a penal colony. An island community where everyone worked hard. This was not a reform for the benefit of the prisoners. It would be a nicer life for the warders, Kevin said; and would leave more room in this crowded island for good citizens' houses and gardens; and since most criminals hated hard work more than they hated anything in this world, it would be a better deterrent than the present plan which, in Kevin's estimation, was no more punitive than a third-rate public school.

Looking at the two figures in the dock Robert thought that in the "bad old days" only the guilty were put in the pillory. Nowadays, it was the untried who bore the pillory and the guilty went immediately into a safe obscurity. Something had gone wrong somewhere.

Old Mrs. Sharpe was wearing the flat black satin hat in which she had appeared at his office on the morning of the *Ack-Emma* irruption into their affairs, and looked academic, respectable, but odd. Marion too was wearing a hat—less, he supposed, out of deference to the court than as some protection against the public gaze. It was a country felt, with a short brim; and its orthodoxy lessened to some extent her normal air of being a law unto herself. With her black hair hidden and her brilliant eyes shadowed she looked no swarthier than a normal out-of-doors woman might. And though Robert missed the black hair and the brilliance he thought that it was all to the good that she should look as "ordinary" as possible. It might lessen the pecking-to-death instinct in her hostile fellows.

And then he saw Betty Kane.

It was the stir on the Press bench that told him she was in court. Normally the Press bench was occupied by two bored apprentices in the art of reporting: one for the *Milford Advertiser* (once weekly, on Fridays) and one combining the *Norton Courier* (twice weekly, Tuesdays and Fridays) with the *Larborough Times* and anyone else who would take the stuff. But today the Press bench was filled, and the faces there were neither young nor bored. They were the faces of men invited to a meal and quite ready for it.

And Betty Kane was two-thirds of what they had come for.

Robert had not seen her since she stood in the drawing-room at The Franchise in her dark blue school coat, and he was surprised all over again by her youth and her candid innocence. In the weeks since he had first seen her she had grown into a monster in his mind; he thought of her only as the perverted creature who had lied two human beings into the dock. Now, seeing the actual physical Betty Kane again, he was nonplussed. He *knew* that this girl and his monster were one, but he found it difficult to realise. And if he, who felt that he now knew Betty Kane so well, reacted like that to her presence, what effect would her child-like grace have on good men and true when the time came?

She was wearing "week-end" clothes, not her school things. A cloudy blue outfit that made one think of forget-me-nots and wood-smoke and bluebells and summer distances, and was farther calculated to bedevil the judgment of sober men. Her young and simple and very-well-brought-up hat stood back from her face and showed the charming brow and the wide-set eyes. Robert absolved Mrs. Wynn, without even having to consider the matter, from any conscious dressing of the girl for the occasion, but was bitterly aware that if she had lain awake at nights devising the outfit it could not have served its purpose better.

When her name was called and she walked to the witness stand, he stole a glance at the faces of those who could see her clearly. With the sole exception of Ben Carley—who was looking at her with the interest one accords a museum exhibit—there was only one expression on the faces of the men: a sort of affectionate compassion. The women, he observed, had not surrendered so easily. The more motherly ones obviously yearned to her youth and her vulnerability, but the younger ones were merely avid; without emotion other than curiosity.

"I—don't—believe—it!" Ben said, sotto voce, while she was taking the oath. "You mean that child was on the loose for a month? I don't believe she's ever kissed anything but the book!"

"I'll bring witnesses to prove it," muttered Robert, angry that even the worldly and cynical Carley was succumbing.

"You could bring ten irreproachable witnesses and still not get a jury to believe it; and it's the jury who count, my friend."

Yes, what jury would believe any bad of her!

Watching her as she was led through her story, he reminded himself of Albert's account of her: the "nicely brought-up girl" whom no one would have thought of as a woman at all, and the cool expertness with which she attached the man she had chosen.

She had a very pleasant voice; young and light and clear; without accent or affectation. And she told her tale like a model witness; volunteering no extras, explicit in what she did say. The pressmen could hardly keep their eyes on their shorthand. The Bench was obviously doting. (God send there was something tougher at the Assizes!) The members of the police force were gently perspiring in sympathy. The body of the court breathless and motionless.

No actress had ever had a better reception.

She was quite calm, as far as anyone could see; and apparently unaware of the effect she was having. She made no effort to make a point, or to use a piece of information dramatically. And Robert found himself wondering whether the understatement was deliberate and whether she realised quite clearly how effective it was.

"And did you in fact mend the linen?"

"I was too stiff from the beating, that night. But I mended some later."

Just as if she were saying: "I was too busy playing bridge." It gave an extraordinary air of truth to what she said.

Nor was there any sign of triumph in the account of her vindication. She had said this and that about the place of her imprisonment and this and that had proved to be so. But she showed no overt pleasure in the fact. When she was asked if she recognized the women in the dock, and if they were in fact the women who had detained and beaten her, she looked at them gravely for a moment of silence and then said that she did and they were.

"Do you want to examine, Mr. Blair?"

"No, sir. I have no questions."

This caused a slight stir of surprise and disappointment in the body of the court, who had looked forward to drama; but it was

accepted by the initiates without remark; it was taken for granted that the case would go forward to another court.

Hallam had already given his statement, and the girl was now followed by the corroborative witnesses.

The man who had seen her picked up by the car proved to be a Post Office sorter called Piper. He worked on a postal van which the L.M.S. ran between Larborough and London, and he was dropped off at Mainshill station on the return journey because it was near his home. He was walking up the long straight London road through Mainshill, when he noticed that a young girl was waiting at the stop for the London coaches. He was still a long distance from her but he noticed her because the London coach had overtaken him about half a minute previously, before he had come within sight of the bus stop; and when he saw her waiting there he realised that she must just have missed it. While he was walking towards her but still some distance away, a car overtook him at a good pace. He did not even glance at it because his interest was concentrated on the girl and on whether when he came up with her he should stop and tell her that the London bus had passed. Then he saw the car slow down alongside the girl. She bent forward to talk to whoever was in it, and then got in herself and was driven away.

By this time he was near enough to describe the car but not to read the number. He had not thought of reading the number anyhow. He was merely glad that the girl had got a lift so quickly.

He would not take an oath that the girl in question was the girl he had seen give evidence, but he was certain in his own mind. She had worn a palish coat and that—grey he thought—and black slippers.

Slippers?

Well, those shoes with no straps across the instep.

Court shoes.

Well, court shoes, but he called them slippers. (And had every intention, his tone made it clear, of going on calling them slippers.)

"Do you want to examine, Mr. Blair?"

"No, thank you, sir."

Then came Rose Glyn.

Robert's first impression was of the vulgar perfection of her teeth. They reminded him of a false set made by a not very clever dentist. There surely never had been, never could be, any natural teeth as flashily perfect as those Rose Glyn had produced as substitutes for her milk teeth.

The Bench did not like her teeth either, it seemed, and Rose soon stopped smiling. But her tale was lethal enough. She had been in the habit of going to The Franchise every Monday to clean the house. On a Monday in April she had been there as usual, and was preparing to leave in the evening when she heard screaming coming from upstairs somewhere. She thought something had happened to Mrs. or Miss Sharpe and ran to the foot of the stairs to see. The screaming seemed to be far away, as if it came from the attic. She was going to go upstairs, but Mrs. Sharpe came out of the drawing-room and asked her what she was doing. She said someone was screaming upstairs. Mrs. Sharpe said nonsense, that she was imagining things, and wasn't it time that she was going home. The screaming had stopped then, and while Mrs. Sharpe was talking Miss Sharpe came downstairs. Miss Sharpe went with Mrs. Sharpe into the drawing-room, and Mrs. Sharpe said something about "ought to be more careful." She was frightened, she did not quite know why, and went away to the kitchen and took her money from where it was always left for her on the kitchen mantelpiece, and ran from the house. The date was April the 15th. She remembered the date because she had decided that next time she went back, on the following Monday, she would give the Sharpes her week's notice; and she had in fact done that and had not worked for the Sharpes since Monday April the 29th.

Robert was faintly cheered by the bad impression she was patently making on everyone. Her open delight in the dramatic, her Christmas Supplement glossiness, her obvious malice, and her horrible clothes, were unhappily contrasted with the restraint and good sense and good taste of her predecessor in the witness box. From the expressions on the faces of her audience she was summed up as a slut and no one would trust her with sixpence.

But that did nothing to discount the evidence she had just given on oath.

Robert, letting her go, wondered if there was any way of pinning that watch on her, so to speak. Being a country girl, unversed in the ways of pawnshops, it was unlikely that she had stolen that watch to sell it; she had taken it to keep for herself. That being so, was there perhaps some way of convicting her of theft and so discrediting her evidence to that extent?

She was succeeded by her friend Gladys Rees. Gladys was as small and pale and skinny as her friend was opulent. She was scared and ill at ease, and took the oath hesitatingly. Her accent was so broad that even the Court found difficulty in following her, and the prosecution had several times to translate her wilder flights of English into something nearer common speech. But the gist of her evidence was clear. On the evening of Monday the 15th April she had gone walking with her friend, Rose Glyn. No, not anywhere special, just walking after supper. Up to High Wood and back. And Rose Glyn had told her that she was scared of The Franchise because she had heard someone screaming in an upstairs room, although there was supposed not to be anyone there. She, Gladys, knew that it was Monday the 15th that Rose had told her that, because Rose had said that when she went next week she was going to give notice. And she had given notice and had not worked for the Sharpes since Monday the 29th.

"I wonder what dear Rose has got on her," Carley said, as she left the witness box.

"What makes you think she has anything?"

"People don't come and perjure themselves for friendship; not even country morons like Gladys Rees. The poor silly little rat was frightened stiff. She would never have come voluntarily. No, that oleograph has a lever of some sort. Worth looking into if you're stuck, perhaps."

"Do you happen to know the number of your watch?" he asked Marion as he was driving them back to The Franchise. "The one Rose Glyn stole."

"I didn't even know that watches had numbers," Marion said.

"Good ones do."

"Oh, mine was a good one, but I don't know anything about its number. It was very distinctive, though. It had a pale blue enamel face with gold figures."

"Roman figures?"

"Yes. Why do you ask? Even if I got it back I could never bear to wear it after that girl."

"It wasn't so much getting it back I thought of, as convicting her of having taken it."

"That would be nice."

"Ben Carley calls her 'the oleograph,' by the way."

"How lovely. That is just what she is like. Is that the little man you wanted to push us off on to, that first day?"

"That's the one."

"I am so glad that I refused to be pushed."

"I hope you will still be as glad when this case is over," Robert said, suddenly sober.

"We have not yet thanked you for standing surety for our bail," Mrs. Sharpe said from the back of the car.

"If we began to thank him for all we owe him," Marion said, "there would be no end to it."

Except, he thought, that he had enlisted Kevin Macdermott on their side—and that was an accident of friendship—what had he been able to do for them? They would go for trial at Norton little more than a fortnight hence, and they had no defence whatever.

The newspaper had a field-day on Tuesday.

Now that the Franchise affair was a court case, it could no longer provide a crusade for either the *Ack-Emma* or the *Watchman*—though the *Ack-Emma* did not fail to remind its gratified readers that on such and such a date *they* had said so and so, a plain statement which was on the surface innocent and unexceptionable but was simply loaded with the forbidden comment; and Robert had no doubt that on Friday the *Watchman* would be taking similar credit to itself, with similar discretion. But the rest of the Press, who had not so far taken any interest in a case that the police had no intention of touching, woke with a glad shout to report a case that was news. Even the soberer dailies held accounts of the court appearance of the Sharpes, with headings like: EXTRAORDINARY CASE, and: UNUSUAL CHARGE. The less inhibited had full descriptions of the principal actors in the case, including Mrs. Sharpe's hat and Betty Kane's blue outfit, pictures of The Franchise, the High Street in Milford, a school friend of Betty Kane, and anything else that was even approximately relevant.

And Robert's heart sank. Both the *Ack-Emma* and the *Watchman*, in their different ways, had used the Franchise affair as a stunt. Something to be used for its momentary worth and dropped tomorrow. But now it was a national interest, reported by every kind of paper from Cornwall to Caithness; and showed signs of becoming a *cause célèbre*.

For the first time he had a feeling of desperation. Events were hounding him, and he had no refuge. The thing was beginning to pile up into a tremendous climax at Norton and he had nothing to contribute to that climax; nothing at all. He felt as a man might feel if he saw a stacked heap of loaded crates begin to lean over towards him and had neither retreat nor a prop to stay the avalanche.

Ramsden grew more and more monosyllabic on the telephone, and less and less encouraging. Ramsden was sore. "Baffled" was a word used in boys' detective stories; it had not until now had even the remotest connection with Alec Ramsden. So Ramsden was sore, monosyllabic, and dour.

The one bright spot in the days that followed the court at Milford was provided by Stanley, who tapped on his door on Thursday morning, poked his head in, and seeing that Robert was alone came in, pushing the door to with one hand and fishing in the pocket of his dungarees with the other.

"Morning," he said. "I think you ought to take charge of these. Those women at The Franchise have no sense at all. They keep pound notes in tea-pots and books and what not. If you're looking for a telephone number you're as likely as not to find a ten-shilling note marking the butcher's address." He fished out a roll of money and solemnly counted twelve ten-pound notes on to the desk under Robert's nose.

- "A hundred and twenty," he said. "Nice, ain't it?"
- "But what is it?" Robert asked, bewildered.
- "Kominsky."
- "Kominsky?"
- "Don't tell me you didn't have anything on! After the old lady giving us the tip herself. Mean to say you forgot about it!"
- "Stan, I haven't even remembered lately that there was such a thing as the Guineas. So you backed it?"
- "At sixties. And that's the tenth I told her she was on to, for the tip."
- "But-a tenth? You must have been plunging, Stan."
- "Twenty pounds. Twice as much as my normal ceiling. Bill did a bit of good too. Going to give his missus a fur coat."
- "So Kominsky won."
- "Won by a length and a half on a tight rein; and was that a turn up for the book!"
- "Well," Robert said, stacking the notes and banding them, "if the worst comes to the worst and they end up bankrupt, the old lady can always do a fair trade as a tipster."
- Stanley eyed his face for a moment in silence, apparently not happy about something in his tone. "Things are pretty bad, 'm?" he said.
 - "Fierce," said Robert, using one of Stanley's own descriptions.
- "Bill's missus went to the court," Stan said, after a pause. "She said she wouldn't believe that girl even if she told her there were twelve pennies in a shilling."
 - "Oh?" Robert said, surprised. "Why?"
 - "Much too good to be true, she said she was. She said no girl of fifteen was ever as good as that."
 - "She's sixteen now."
- "All right, sixteen. She said she was fifteen once and so were all her girl friends, and that wide-eyed-wonder didn't fool her for a moment."
 - "I'm very much afraid it will fool a jury."
 - "Not if you had an all-woman jury. I suppose there's no way of wangling that?"
 - "Not short of Herod measures. Don't you want to give this money to Mrs. Sharpe yourself, by the way?"
- "Not me. You'll be going out there sometime today, and you can give it to her if you like. But see you get it back and put it in the bank or they'll be picking it out of flower vases years hence and wondering when they put that there."

Robert smiled as he put the money away in his pocket to the sound of Stanley's departing feet. Endlessly unexpected, people were. He would have taken it for granted that Stan would have revelled in counting those notes out in front of the old lady. But instead he had turned shy. That tale of money in tea-pots was just a tale.

Robert took the money out to The Franchise in the afternoon, and for the first time saw tears in Marion's eyes. He told the tale as Stanley had told it—tea-pots and all—and finished: "So he made me his deputy"; and it was then that Marion's eyes had filled.

"Why did he mind about giving it to us?" she said, fingering the notes. "He's not usually so—so—"

"I think it may be that he considers that you need it now, and that that makes it a delicate affair instead of a matter-of-fact one. When you gave him the tip you were just the well-off Sharpes who lived at The Franchise, and he would have turned over the proceeds to you with éclat. But now you are two women out on bail of £200 each in your personal recognizances and of a similar sum by one surety on behalf of you each; to say nothing of having the expenses of a counsel to come; and are therefore, I think, in Stan's mind not people that one can hand over money to easily."

"Well," said Mrs. Sharpe, "not all my tips have had a margin of a length-and-a-half on the right side. But I don't deny that I am very glad to see the percentage. It was very kind of the boy."

"Should we keep as much as ten percent?" Marion asked doubtfully.

"That was the arrangement," Mrs. Sharpe said equably. "If it hadn't been for me he would be short by the amount of a bet on Bali Boogie at this moment. What is a Bali Boogie, by the way?"

"I am glad you came," Marion said, ignoring her mother's quest for education, "because something unexpected has happened. My watch has come back."

"You mean you've found it?"

"No, oh no. She sent it back through the post. Look!"

She produced a small, very dirty, white cardboard box, which contained her watch with the blue enamel face and the wrapping that had been round the watch. The wrapping was a square of pinkish tissue paper with a circular stamp reading SUN VALLEY, TRANSVAAL, and had evidently started life embracing an orange. On a torn piece of paper was printed: I DON'T WANT NONE OF IT. The capital I was dotted with a small letter, after the fashion of illiterates.

"Why do you think she turned squeamish about it?" Marion wondered.

"I don't for a moment think she did," Robert said. "I couldn't imagine that girl ever relinquishing anything that her hand had closed over."

"But she did. She sent it back."

"No. Someone sent it back. Someone who was frightened. Someone with a rudimentary conscience, too. If Rose Glyn had wanted to be rid of it she would have thrown it into a pond, without a second thought. But X wants to be rid of it and to make restitution at the same time. X has both a bad conscience and a frightened soul. Now who would have a bad conscience about you just now? Gladys Rees?"

"Yes, of course you are right about Rose. I should have thought of that. She never would have sent it back. She would have put her heel on it sooner. You think perhaps she gave it to Gladys Rees?"

"That might explain a lot. It might explain how Rose got her to court to back up that 'screaming' story. I mean, if she had been the receiver of stolen goods. When you come to think of it, Rose could have very little chance of wearing a watch that the Staples people must quite often have seen on your wrist. It is much more likely that she was 'large' with it in favour of her friend. 'A little thing I picked up.' Where does the Rees girl belong to?"

"I don't know where she belongs to; somewhere the other side of the county, I think. But she has come to work for that isolated farm beyond Staples."

"Long ago?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"So she could wear a new watch without question. Yes, I think it was Gladys who sent back your watch. If ever there was an unwilling witness it was Gladys on Monday. And if Gladys is shakeable to the point of sending back your property, a faint hope begins to dawn."

"But she has committed perjury," Mrs. Sharpe said. "Even a moron like Gladys Rees must have some glimmering of awareness that that is not well seen in a British court."

"She could plead that she was blackmailed into it. If someone suggested that course to her."

Mrs. Sharpe eyed him. "Isn't there anything in English law about tampering with a witness?" she asked.

"Plenty. But I don't propose to do any tampering."

"What do you propose to do?"

"I must think it over. It is a delicate situation."

"Mr. Blair, the intricacies of the Law have always been beyond me, and are always likely to be, but you won't get yourself put away for contempt of court, or something like that, will you? I can't imagine what the present situation would be like without your support."

Robert said that he had no intention of getting himself put away for anything. That he was a blameless solicitor of unblemished reputation and high moral principles and that she need have no fear either for herself or for him.

"If we could knock the prop of Gladys Rees from under Rose's story it would undermine their whole case," he said. "It's their most valuable piece of evidence: that Rose had mentioned the screaming before there was any suggestion of a charge against you. I suppose you couldn't see Grant's face when Rose was giving evidence? A fastidious mind must be a great handicap in the C.I.D. It must be sad to have your whole case depend on someone you would hate to touch with a barge-pole. Now I must be getting back. May I take the little cardboard box and the scrap of paper with the printing?"

"It was clever of you to have seen that Rose would not have sent it back," Marion said, putting the scrap of paper into the box

and giving it to him. "You should have been a detective."

"Either that or a fortune-teller. Everything deduced from the egg-stain on the waistcoat. Au revoir."

Robert drove back to Milford with his mind full of this new possibility. It was no solution to their predicament, but it might be a lifeline.

In the office he found Mr. Ramsden waiting for him; long, grey, lean, and dour.

"I came to see you, Mr. Blair, because it wasn't a thing that could be said over the telephone very well."

"Well?"

"Mr. Blair, we're wasting your money. Do you happen to know what the white population of the world is?"

"No. I don't."

"Neither do I. But what you're asking me to do is to pick this girl out of the white population of the world. Five thousand men working for a year mightn't do it. One man might do it tomorrow. It's a matter of pure chance."

"But it always has been that."

"No. In the first days the chances were fair. We covered the obvious places. The ports, the airports, the travel places, the best known 'honeymoon' places. And I didn't waste your time or money in any travelling. I have contacts in all the big towns and in a lot of the smaller ones, and I just send them a request saying: 'Find out if such and such a person stayed at one of your hotels,' and the answer is back in a few hours. Answers from all over Britain. Well, that done, we are left with a small proposition called the rest of the world. And I don't like wasting your money, Mr. Blair. Because that is what it will amount to."

"Do I understand that you are giving up?"

"I don't put it like that, exactly."

"You think I should give you notice because you have failed."

Mr. Ramsden stiffened noticeably at the word "failed."

"It's throwing good money away on a long chance. It isn't a business proposition, Mr. Blair. It isn't even a good gamble."

"Well, I have something for your consideration that is definite enough to please you, I think." He fished the little cardboard box out of his pocket. "One of the witnesses on Monday was a girl called Gladys Rees. Her role was to supply evidence that her friend Rose Glyn had talked to her about screams at The Franchise long before the police were interested in the place. Well, she supplied the evidence all right, but not con amore, as you might say. She was nervous, unwilling, and was obviously hating it—in contrast to her friend Rose who was having the time of her life. One of my local colleagues suggested that Rose had got her there by pressure, but that didn't seem very likely at the time. This morning, however, the watch that Rose stole from Miss Sharpe came back by post in this box, with the printed message enclosed. Now Rose would never have bothered to return the watch; she has no conscience at all. Nor would she have written the note; having no desire to repudiate anything. The conclusion is inescapable, that it was Gladys who received the watch—Rose could not have worn it without detection anyhow—and that that was how Rose got her to back up her lies."

He paused to let Ramsden comment. Mr. Ramsden nodded; but it was an interested nod.

"Now, we can't approach Gladys with any kind of argument without being accused of intimidating witnesses. I mean, getting her to go back on her story before the Assizes is not possible. All we can do is to concentrate on breaking her down at the Assizes. Kevin Macdermott could probably do it by force of personality and persistent questions, but I doubt it; and anyhow the Court might stop him before he had achieved anything. They are apt to look sideways on him when he begins to ride a witness."

"They are?"

"What I want to do is to be able to put this printed scrap into court as evidence. To be able to say that it is Gladys Rees's writing. With the evidence that it was she who had the stolen watch, we make the suggestion that Rose used pressure on her to testify to what is not true, Macdermott assures her that if she was blackmailed into giving false evidence she will probably not be punished for it, and she breaks down and confesses."

"So you want another specimen of Gladys Rees's printing."

"Yes. And coming along just now I was thinking about it. I have the impression that her present job is her first one, so it can't be very long since she left school. Perhaps her school could furnish one. Or anyhow, provide a starting-off place. It would be enormously to our advantage if we could come by a specimen without *provocateur* methods. Do you think you could do something about it?"

"I'll get you a specimen, yes," Ramsden said; as who should say: Give me any reasonable commission and it will be executed. "Did the Rees girl go to school here?"

"No, I understand she comes from the other side of the county."

"All right, I'll find out. Where is she working now?"

"At an isolated place called Bratt's Farm; over the fields from Staples, the place behind The Franchise."

"And about the search for the Kane girl—"

"Isn't there anything you could still do in Larborough itself? I can't teach you anything about your business, I know that, but she was in Larborough."

"Yes, and where she was we traced her. In public places. But X may *live* in Larborough, for all we know. She may just have gone to ground there. After all, a month—or practically a month—is an odd time for that sort of disappearance, Mr. Blair. That sort of thing usually ranges from a week-end to ten days but not longer. She may just have gone home with him."

"Do you think that is what happened?"

"No," Ramsden said slowly. "If you want my honest opinion, Mr. Blair, it is that we have missed her at one of the exits."

'Exits?"

"That she went out of the country, but looking so different that that butter-wouldn't-melt photograph didn't convey her at all."

"Why different?"

"Well, I don't suppose she was provided with a phoney passport, so she would presumably travel as his wife."

"Yes, of course. I took that for granted."

"And she couldn't do that looking as she does. But with her hair swept up and some make-up on, she would look quite different. You have no idea the difference sweeping-up hair-dressing makes to a woman. The first time I saw my wife with one I didn't recognise her. It made her so different if you want to know, that I felt quite shy with her; and we'd been married twenty years."

"So that's what you think happened. I expect you're right," Robert said sadly.

"That's why I don't want to waste any more of your money, Mr. Blair. Looking for the girl in the photograph is not much use, because the girl we're looking for didn't look a bit like that. When she *did* look like that, people recognised her at first glance. At the cinemas and what not. We traced her easily enough during her time on her own in Larborough. But from then on it's a complete blank. Her photograph doesn't convey her to anyone who saw her after she left Larborough."

Robert sat doodling on Miss Tuff's nice fresh blotting-paper. A herring-bone pattern; very neat and decorative. "You see what this means, don't you? We are sunk."

"But you have this," Ramsden protested, indicating the printed scrap of paper that had come with the watch.

"That merely destroys the police case. It doesn't disprove Betty Kane's story. If the Sharpes are ever to be rid of this thing the girl's story has to be shown to be nonsense. Our only chance of doing that is to find out where she was during those weeks."

"Yes. I see."

"I suppose you have checked on private owners?"

"Planes? Oh, yes. The same thing goes there. We have no photograph of the man, so he might be any one of the hundreds of private owners who went abroad with female companions in the specified time."

"Yes. Pretty well sunk. Not much wonder Ben Carley was amused."

"You're tired, Mr. Blair. You've been having a worrying time."

"Yes. It isn't very often a country solicitor has something like this dumped on his shoulders," Robert said wryly.

Ramsden regarded him with what amounted on the Ramsden visage to a smile. "For a country solicitor," he said, "it seems to me you're not doing badly, Mr. Blair. Not badly at all."

"Thanks," Robert said, really smiling. Coming from Alec Ramsden that was practically an O.M.

"I shouldn't let it get you down. You've got an insurance against the very worst happening—or will, when I get that printed evidence."

Robert flung down the pen he had been doodling with. "I'm not interested in insurance," he said with sudden heat. "I'm interested in justice. I have only one ambition in life at this moment. And that is to have Betty Kane's story disproved in open court. To have the full account of what she did during those weeks made public in her presence and duly backed up by irreproachable witnesses. What are our chances of that, do you think? And what—tell me—what have we left untried that could possibly help us?"

"I don't know," Mr. Ramsden said, seriously. "Prayer, perhaps."

This, oddly enough, was also Aunt Lin's reaction.

Aunt Lin had become gradually reconciled to Robert's connection with the Franchise affair as it moved from the provincial-unsavoury to the national-celebrated. It was, after all, no disgrace to be connected with a case that was reported in *The Times*. Aunt Lin did not, of course, read *The Times*, but her friends did. The vicar, and old Colonel Whittaker, and the girl at Boots and old Mrs. Warren from Weymouth (Swanage); and it was vaguely gratifying to think that Robert should be solicitor for the defence in a famous trial, even if the defence was against a charge of beating a helpless girl. And of course it had never even remotely shadowed her mind that Robert would not win the case. She had taken that quite placidly for granted. In the first place Robert himself was so clever; and in the second Blair, Hayward, and Bennet could not conceivably be connected with a failure. She had even regretted in her own mind, in passing, that his triumph would take place over at Norton and not in Milford where everyone might be there to see.

So that the first hint of doubt came as a surprise to her. Not a shock, since she still could not visualise the prospect of failure. But definitely as a new thought.

"But, Robert," she said, sweeping her foot round under the table in an effort to locate her footstool, "you don't suppose for a moment that you are going to *lose* the case, do you?"

"On the contrary," Robert said, "I don't suppose for a moment that we shall win it."

"Robert!"

"In trial by jury it is customary to have a case to put to the jury. So far we have no case. And I don't think that the jury is going to like that at all."

"You sound quite pettish, dear. I think you are allowing the thing to get on your nerves. Why don't you take tomorrow afternoon off and arrange a golf four? You have hardly golfed at all lately and it can't be good for your liver. Not golfing, I mean."

"I can't believe," Robert said wonderingly, "that I was ever interested in the fate of 'a piece of gutta-percha' on a golf course. That must have been in some other life."

"That is what I say, dear. You are losing your sense of proportion. Allowing this affair to worry you quite unnecessarily. After all, you have Kevin."

"That I take leave to doubt."

"What do you mean, dear?"

"I can't imagine Kevin taking time off and travelling down to Norton to defend a case that he is fore-ordained to lose. He has his quixotic moments, but they don't entirely obliterate his common sense."

"But Kevin promised to come."

"When he made that promise there was still time for a defence to materialise. Now we can almost count the days to the Assizes and still we have no evidence—and no prospect of any."

Miss Bennet eyed him over her soup spoon. "I don't think, you know, dear," she said, "that you have enough faith."

Robert refrained from saying that he had none at all. Not, anyhow, where divine intervention in the Franchise affair was concerned.

"Have faith, my dear," she said happily, "and it will all come right. You'll see." The charged silence that succeeded this evidently worried her a little, for she added: "If I had known you were doubtful or unhappy about the case, dear, I should have said extra prayers about it long ago. I am afraid I took it for granted that you and Kevin would manage it between you." "It" being British justice. "But now that I know you are worrying about it I shall most certainly put up some special petitions."

The matter-of-fact application-for-relief tone with which this was uttered restored Robert's good humour.

"Thank you, darling," he said in his normal good-natured voice.

She laid the spoon down on her empty plate and sat back; and a small teasing smile appeared on her round pink face. "I know that tone," she said. "It means that you're humouring me. But there's no need to, you know. It's I who am right about this, and you are wrong. It says quite distinctly that faith will move mountains. The difficulty always is that it takes a quite colossal faith to move a mountain; and is practically impossible to assemble so large a faith, so mountains are practically never moved. But in lesser cases—like the present one—it is possible to have enough faith for the occasion. So instead of being deliberately hopeless, dear, do *try* to have some confidence in the event. Meanwhile I shall go along to St. Matthew's this evening and spend a little time praying that you will be given a piece of evidence tomorrow morning. That will make you feel happier."

When Alec Ramsden walked into his room next morning with the piece of evidence, Robert's first thought was that nothing could prevent Aunt Lin taking credit for it. Nor was there any hope of his not mentioning it, since the first thing she would ask him at luncheon, in bright confident tones, would be: "Well, dear, did you get the evidence I prayed for?"

Ramsden was both pleased with himself and amused; so much could be translated, at any rate, from the Ramsden idiom into common knowledge.

"I had better confess frankly, Mr. Blair, that when you sent me to that school I had no great hopes. I went because it seemed to be as good a starting-place as any, and I might find out from the staff some good way of getting acquainted with Rees. Or

rather, letting one of my boys get acquainted. I had even worked out how we could get printed letters from her without any fuss, once one of my boys got off with her. But you're a wonder, Mr. Blair. You had the right idea after all."

"You mean you've got what we wanted!"

"I saw her form mistress, and was quite frank about what we wanted and why. Well, as frank as need be. I said Gladys was suspected of perjury—a penal servitude affair—but that we thought she'd been blackmailed into giving her evidence, and to prove it was blackmail we needed a sample of any printed letters she ever wrote. Well, when you sent me there I took it for granted that she would not have printed a single letter since she left the kindergarten. But the form mistress—a Miss Baggaly—said to give her a minute to think. 'Of course,' she said, 'she was very good at drawing, and if I have nothing perhaps the visiting art-mistress might have something. We like to keep good work when our pupils produce it.' As a comfort for all the duds they have to put up with, I suppose, poor things. Well, I didn't have to see the art-mistress, because Miss Baggaly hunted through some things, and produced this."

He laid a sheet of paper down on the desk in front of Robert. It appeared to be a free-hand map of Canada, showing the principal divisions, towns and rivers. It was inaccurate but very neat. Across the bottom was printed DOMINION OF CANADA. And in the right-hand corner was the signature: Gladys Rees.

"It seems that every summer, at breaking-up time, they have an exhibition of work, and they normally keep the exhibits until the next exhibition the following year. I suppose it would seem too callous just to toss them out the day after. Or perhaps they keep them to show to visiting big-wigs and inspectors. Anyhow, there were drawers full of the stuff. This," he indicated the map, "was a product of a competition—'Draw a map of any country from memory in twenty minutes'—and the three prize winners had their answers exhibited. This was a 'third equal.' "

"I can hardly believe it," Robert said, feasting his eyes on Gladys Rees's handiwork.

"Miss Baggaly was right about her being good with her hands. Funny, when she stayed so illiterate. You can see where they corrected her dotted capital I's."

You could indeed. Robert was gloating over the place.

"She has no mind, the girl, but a good eye," he said, considering Gladys's idea of Canada. "She remembered the shape of things but not the names. And the spelling is entirely her own. I suppose the 'third equal' was for the neat work."

"Neat work for us anyhow," Ramsden said, laying down the scrap of paper that had come with the watch. "Let us be thankful she didn't choose Alaska."

"Yes," Robert said. "A miracle." (Aunt Lin's miracle, his mind said.) "Who is the best man at this sort of thing?"

Ramsden told him.

"I'll take it up to town with me now, tonight, and have the report before morning, and I'll take it round to Mr. Macdermott at breakfast time, if that's all right with you."

"Right?" said Robert. "It's perfect."

"I think it might be a good idea to finger-print them too—and the little cardboard box. There *are* judges who don't like handwriting experts, but the two together would convince even a judge."

"Well," Robert said, handing them over, "at least my clients are not going to be sentenced to hard labour."

"There's nothing like looking on the bright side," Ramsden commented dryly; and Robert laughed.

"You think I'm ungrateful for such a dispensation. I'm not. It's a terrific load off my mind. But the real load is still there. Proving that Rose Glyn is a thief, liar, and blackmailer—with perjury thrown in as a sideline—leaves Betty Kane's story still untouched. And it is Betty Kane's story that we set out to disprove."

"There's still time," Ramsden said; but half-heartedly.

"About all there is time for is a miracle."

"Well? Why not? They happen. Why shouldn't they happen to us? What time shall I telephone you tomorrow?"

But it was Kevin who telephoned on the morrow; full of congratulations and jubilation. "You're a marvel, Rob. I'll make mincemeat of them."

Yes, it would be a lovely little exercise in cat-and-mouse play for Kevin; and the Sharpes would walk out of the court "free." Free to go back to their haunted house and their haunted existence; two half-mad witches who had once threatened and beaten a girl.

"You don't sound very gay, Rob. Is it getting you down?"

Robert said what he was thinking; that the Sharpes saved from prison would still be in a prison of Betty Kane's making.

"Perhaps not, perhaps not," Kevin said. "I'll do my best with the Kane over that howler about the divided path. Indeed, if Miles Allison weren't prosecuting I could probably break her with it; but Miles will probably be quick enough to retrieve the situation. Cheer up, Rob. At the very least her credit will be seriously shaken."

But shaking Betty Kane's credit was not enough. He knew just how little effect that would have on the general public. He had had a large experience lately of the woman-in-the-street and had been appalled by the general inability to analyse the simplest statement. Even if the newspapers were to report that small bit about the view from the window—and they would probably be much too busy reporting the more sensational matter of Rose Glyn's perjury—even if they reported it, it would have no effect on the average reader. "They tried to put her in the wrong but they were very quickly put in their place." That is all it would convey to them.

Kevin might successfully shake Betty Kane's credit with the Court, the reporters, the officials, and any critical minds who happened to be present; but on the present evidence he could do nothing to alter the strong feeling of partisanship that Betty Kane's case had aroused throughout the country. The Sharpes would stay condemned.

And Betty Kane would "get away with it."

That to Robert was a thought that was even worse than the prospect of the Sharpes' haunted life. Betty Kane would go on being the centre of an adoring family; secure, loved, hero-worshipped. The once easy-going Robert grew homicidal at the

thought.

He had had to confess to Aunt Lin that a piece of evidence had turned up at the time specified in her prayers, but had pusillanimously refrained from telling her that the said evidence was good enough to destroy the police case. She would call that winning the case; and "winning," to Robert, meant something very different.

To Nevil, too, it seemed. And for the first time since young Bennet came to occupy the back room that used to be his, Robert thought of him as an ally; a communal spirit. To Nevil, too, it was unthinkable that Betty Kane should "get away with it." And Robert was surprised all over again at the murderous rage that fills the pacifist-minded when their indignation is roused. Nevil had a special way of saying "Betty Kane": as if the syllables were some poison he had put in his mouth by mistake and he was spitting it out. "Poisonous," too, was his favourite epithet for her. "That poisonous creature." Robert found him very comforting.

But there was little comfort in the situation. The Sharpes had accepted the news of their probable escape from a prison sentence with the same dignity that had characterised their acceptance of everything, from Betty Kane's first accusation to the serving of a summons and an appearance in the dock. But they, too, realised that the thing would be escape but not vindication. The police case would break down, and they would get their verdict. But they would get it because in English law there was no middle course. In a Scots court the verdict would be Not Proven. And that, in fact, would be what the result of the Assizes verdict next week would amount to. Merely that the police had not had good enough evidence to prove their case. Not that the case was necessarily a bad one.

It was when the Assizes were only four days away that he confessed to Aunt Lin that the evidence did suffice to defeat the charge. The growing worry on that round pink face was too much for him. He had meant merely to give her that sop and leave the matter there; but instead he found himself pouring it all out to her as he had poured out his troubles as a small boy; in the days when Aunt Lin was an omniscient and omnipotent angel and not just kind, silly Aunt Lin. She listened to this unexpected torrent of words—so different from the normal phrases of their meal-time intercourse—in surprised silence, her jewel-blue eyes attentive and concerned.

"Don't you see, Aunt Lin, it isn't victory; it's defeat," he finished. "It's a travesty of justice. It isn't a verdict we're fighting for; it's justice. And we have no hope of getting it. Not a ghost of a hope!"

"But why didn't you tell me all this, dear? Did you think I would not understand, or agree, or something?"

"Well, you didn't feel as I did about—"

"Just because I didn't much like the look of those people at The Franchise—and I must confess, dear, even now, that they aren't the kind of people I naturally take to—just because I didn't much like them doesn't mean that I am indifferent to seeing justice done, surely?"

"No, of course not; but you said quite frankly that you found Betty Kane's story believable, and so—"

"That," said Aunt Lin calmly, "was before the police court."

"The court? But you weren't at the court."

"No, dear, but Colonel Whittaker was, and he didn't like the girl at all."

"Didn't he, indeed."

"No. He was quite eloquent about it. He said he had once had a—a what-do-you-call-it—a lance-corporal in his regiment, or battalion or something, who was exactly like Betty Kane. He said he was an injured innocent who set the whole battalion by the ears and was more trouble than a dozen hard-cases. Such a nice expression: hardcases, isn't it. He finished up in the greenhouse, Colonel Whittaker said."

"The glasshouse."

"Well, something like that. And as for the Glyn girl from Staples, he said that one glance at her and you automatically began to reckon the number of lies there would be per sentence. He didn't like the Glyn girl either. So you see, dear, you needn't have thought that I would be unsympathetic about your worry. I am just as interested in abstract justice as you are, I assure you. And I shall redouble my prayers for your success. I was going over to the Gleasons' garden party this afternoon, but I shall go along to St. Matthew's instead and spend a quiet hour there. I think it is going to rain in any case. It always does rain at the Gleasons' garden party, poor things."

"Well, Aunt Lin, I don't deny we need your prayers. Nothing short of a miracle can save us now."

"Well, I shall pray for the miracle."

"A last-minute reprieve with the rope round the hero's neck? That happens only in detective stories and the last few minutes of horse-operas."

"Not at all. It happens every day, somewhere in the world. If there was some way of finding out and adding up the times it happens you would no doubt be surprised. Providence does take a hand, you know, when other methods fail. You haven't enough faith, my dear, as I pointed out before."

"I don't believe that an angel of the Lord is going to appear in my office with an account of what Betty Kane was doing for that month, if that is what you mean," Robert said.

"The trouble with you, dear, is that you think of an angel of the Lord as a creature with wings, whereas he is probably a scruffy little man in a bowler hat. Anyhow, I shall pray very hard this afternoon, and tonight too, of course; and by tomorrow perhaps help will be sent."

The angel of the Lord was not a scruffy little man, as it turned out; and his hat was a regrettably continental affair of felt with a tightly rolled brim turned up all round. He arrived at Blair, Hayward, and Bennet's about halfpast eleven the following morning. "Mr. Robert," old Mr. Heseltine said, putting his head in at Robert's door, "there's a Mr. Lange in the office to see you. He

Robert, who was busy, and not expecting angels of the Lord, and quite used to strangers turning up in the office and wanting to see him, said: "What does he want? I'm busy."

"He didn't say. He just said he would like to see you if you were not too busy."

"Well, I'm scandalously busy. Find out tactfully what he wants, will you? If it is nothing important Nevil can deal with it."

"Yes, I'll find out; but his English is very thick, and he doesn't seem very willing to—"

"English? You mean, he has a lisp?"

"No, I mean his pronunciation of English isn't very good. He--"

"The man's a foreigner, you mean?"

"Yes. He comes from Copenhagen."

"Copenhagen! Why didn't you tell me that before!"

"You didn't give me a chance, Mr. Robert."

"Show him in, Timmy, show him in. Oh, merciful Heaven, do fairy-tales come true?"

Mr. Lange was rather like one of the Norman pillars of Notre Dame. Just as round, just as high, just as solid and just as dependable-looking. Far away at the top of this great round solid erect pillar his face shone with friendly rectitude.

"Mr. Blair?" he said. "My name is Lange. I apologise for bothering you"—he failed to manage the TH—"but it was important. Important to you, I mean. At least, yes I think."

"Sit down, Mr. Lange."

"Thank you, thank you. It is warm, is it not? This is perhaps the day you have your summer?" He smiled on Robert. "That is an idiom of the English, that joke about one-day summer. I am greatly interested in the English idiom. It is because of my interest in English idiom that I come to see you."

Robert's heart sank to his heels with the plummet swoop of an express lift. Fairy-tales, indeed. No; fairy-tales stay fairy-tales.

"Yes?" he said encouragingly.

"I keep a hotel in Copenhagen, Mr. Blair. The hotel of the Red Shoes it is called. Not, of course, because anyone wears red shoes there but because of a tale of Andersen, which you perhaps may—"

"Yes, yes," Robert said. "It has become one of our tales too."

"Ah, so! Yes. A great man, Andersen. So simple a man and now so international. It is a thing to marvel at. But I waste your time, Mr. Blair, I waste your time. What was I saying?"

"About English idiom."

"Ah, yes. To study English is my hubby."

"Hobby," Robert said, involuntarily.

"Hobby. Thank you. For my bread and butter I keep a hotel—and because my father and his father kept one before me—but for a hub . . . a hobby? yes; thank you—for a hobby I study the idiomatic English. So every day the newspapers that they leave about are brought to me."

"They?"

"The English visitors."

"Ah, yes."

"In the evening, when they have retired, the page collects the English papers and leaves them in my office. I am busy, often, and I do not have time to look at them, and so they go into the pile and when I have leisure I pick one up and study it. Do I make myself clear, Mr. Blair?"

"Perfectly, perfectly, Mr. Lange." A faint hope was rising again. Newspapers?

"So it goes on. A few moments of leisure, a little reading in an English paper, a new idiom—perhaps two—all very without excitement. How do you say that?"

"Placid."

"So. Placid. And then one day I take this paper from the pile, just as I might take any of the others, and I forget all about idiom." He took from his capacious pocket a once-folded copy of the *Ack-Emma*, and spread it in front of Robert on the desk. It was the issue of Friday, May the 10th, with the photograph of Betty Kane occupying two-thirds of the page. "I look at this photograph. Then I look inside and read the story. Then I say to myself that this is most extraordinary. Most extraordinary it is. The paper say this is the photograph of Betty Kann. Kann?"

"Kane."

"Ah. So. Betty Kane. But it is also the photograph of Mrs. Chadwick, who stay at my hotel with her husband."

"What!"

Mr. Lange looked pleased. "You are interested? I so hoped you might be. I did so hope."

"Go on. Tell me."

"A fortnight they stayed with me. And it was most extraordinary, Mr. Blair, because while that poor girl was being beaten and starved in an English attic, Mrs. Chadwick was eating like a young wolf at my hotel—the cream that girl could eat, Mr. Blair, even I, a Dane, was surprised—and enjoying herself very much."

"Yes?"

"Well, I said to myself: It is after all a photograph. And although it is just the way she looked when she let down her hair to come to the ball—"

"Let it down!"

"Yes. She wore her hair brushed up, you see. But we had a ball with costume—"

"Costume?"

"Yes. Fancy dress."

"Ah. So. Fancy dress. And for her fancy dress she lets her hair hang down. Just like that there." He tapped the photograph. "So I say to myself: It is a photograph, after all. How often has one seen a photograph that does not in the least resemble the real person. And what has this girl in the paper to do, possibly, with little Mrs. Chadwick who is here with her husband during that time! So I am reasonable to myself. But I do not throw away the paper. No. I keep it. And now and then I look at it. And each time I look at it I think: But that is Mrs. Chadwick. So I am still puzzled, and going to sleep I think about it when I should be thinking about tomorrow's marketing. I seek explanation from myself. Twins, perhaps? But no; the Betty girl is an only child. Cousins. Coincidence. Doubles. I think of them all. At night they satisfy me, and I turn over and go to sleep. But in the morning I look at the photograph, and all comes to pieces again. I think: But certainly beyond a doubt that is Mrs. Chadwick. You see my dilemma?"

"Perfectly."

"So when I am coming to England on business, I put the newspaper with the Arabic name—"

"Arabic? Oh, yes, I see. I didn't mean to interrupt."

"I put it into my bag, and after dinner one night I take it out and show it to my friend where I am staying. I am staying with a compatriot of mine in Bayswater, London. And my friend is instantly very excited and say: But it is now a police affair, and these women say that never have they seen the girl before. They have been arrested for what they are supposed to have done to this girl and they are about to be tried for it. And he calls to his wife: 'Rita! Rita! Where is the paper of a week last Tuesday?' It is the kind of household, my friend's, where there is always a paper of a week last Tuesday. And his wife come with it and he shows me the account of the trial—no, the—the—"

"Court appearance."

"Yes. The appearance in court of the two women. And I read now the trial is to be at some place in the country in a little more than a fortnight. Well, by now, that would be in a very few days. So my friend says: How sure are you, Einar, that that girl and your Mrs. Chadwick are one? And I say: Very sure indeed I am. So he say: Here in the paper is the name of the solicitor for the women. There is no address but this Milford is a very small place and he will be easy to find. We shall have coffee early tomorrow—that is breakfast—and you will go down to this Milford and tell what you think to this Mr. Blair. So here I am, Mr. Blair. And you are interested in what I say?"

Robert sat back, took out his handkerchief, and mopped his forehead. "Do you believe in miracles, Mr. Lange?"

"But of course. I am a Christian. Indeed, although I am not yet very old I have myself seen two."

"Well, you have just taken part in a third."

"So?" Mr. Lange beamed. "That makes me very content."

"You have saved our bacon."

"Bacon?"

"An English idiom. You have not only saved our bacon. You have practically saved our lives."

"You think, then, as I think, that they are one person, that girl and my guest at the Red Shoes?"

"I haven't a doubt of it. Tell me, have you the dates of her stay with you?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. Here they are. She and her husband arrived by air on Friday the 29th of March, and they left—again by air, I think, though of that I am not so certain—on the 15th of April, a Monday."

"Thank you. And her 'husband,' what did he look like?"

"Young. Dark. Good-looking. A little—now, what is the word? Too-bright. Gaudy? No."

"Flashy?"

"Ah. There is it. Flashy. A little flashy, I think. I observe that he was not greatly approved of by the other Englishmen who came and went."

"Was he just on holiday?"

"No, oh, no. He was in Copenhagen on business."

"What kind of business?"

"That I do not know, I regret."

"Can't you even make a guess? What would he be most likely to be interested in in Copenhagen?"

"That depends, Mr. Blair, on whether he was interested in buying or selling."

"What was his address in England?"

"London."

"Beautifully explicit. Will you forgive me a moment while I telephone? Do you smoke?" He opened the cigarette box and pushed it towards Mr. Lange.

"Milford 195. You will do me the honour of having lunch with me, Mr. Lange, won't you? Aunt Lin? I have to go to London

directly after lunch Yes, for the night. Will you be an angel and pack a small bag for me? . . . Thank you, darling. And would it be all right if I brought someone back to take pot-luck for lunch today? . . . Oh, good Yes, I'll ask him." He covered the mouthpiece, and said: "My aunt, who is actually my cousin, wants to know if you eat pastry?"

"Mr. Blair!" Mr. Lange said, with a wide smile and a wide gesture for his girth. "And you ask a Dane?"

"He loves it," Robert said into the telephone. "And I say, Aunt Lin. Were you doing anything important this afternoon? . . . Because what I think you ought to do is to go to St. Matthew's and give thanks . . . Your angel of the Lord has arrived."

Even Mr. Lange could hear Aunt Lin's delighted: "Robert! No, not really!"

"In the flesh No, not a bit scruffy . . . Very tall and beautiful and altogether perfect for the part You'll give him a good lunch, won't you? . . . Yes, that's who is coming to lunch. An angel of the Lord."

He put down the telephone and looked up at the amused Mr. Lange.

"And now, Mr. Lange, let us go over to the Rose and Crown and have some bad beer."

When Robert went out to The Franchise, three days later, to drive the Sharpes over to Norton for the Assizes on the morrow, he found an almost bridal atmosphere about the place. Two absurd tubs of yellow wallflowers stood at the top of the steps; and the dark hall gleamed with flowers like a church decorated for a wedding.

"Nevil!" Marion said, with an explanatory wave of her hand to the massed glory. "He said the house should be en fête."

"I wish that I had thought of it," Robert said.

"After the last few days, it surprises me that you can think at all. If it were not for you, it is not rejoicing we should be today!"

"If it weren't for a man called Bell, you mean."

"Bell?"

"Alexander Bell. He invented the telephone. If it weren't for that invention we should still be groping in the dark. It will be months before I can look at a telephone without blenching."

"Did you take turn about?"

"Oh, no. We each had our own. Kevin and his clerk at his chambers, me at his little place in St. Paul's Churchyard, Alec Ramsden and three of his men at his office and wherever they could find a telephone that they could use uninterruptedly."

"That was six of you."

"Seven of us with six telephones. And we needed them!"

"Poor Robert!"

"At first it was fun. We were filled with the exhilaration of the hunt, of knowing that we were on the right track. Success was practically in our laps. But by the time we had made sure that none of the Chadwicks in the London telephone book had any connection with a Chadwick who had flown to Copenhagen on the 29th of March, and that all the air line knew about him was that two seats had been booked from Larborough on the 27th, we had lost any feeling of fun we had started with. The Larborough information cheered us, of course. But after that it was pure slog. We found out what we sold to Denmark and what she bought from us, and we divided them up between us."

"The merchandise?"

"No, the buyers and sellers. The Danish tourist office was a god-send. They just poured information at us. Kevin, his clerk, and I took the exports, and Ramsden and his men took the imports. From then on it was a tedious business of being put through to managers and asking: 'Have you a man called Bernard Chadwick working for you?' The number of firms who *haven't* got a Bernard Chadwick working for them is unbelievable. But I know a lot more about our exports to Denmark than I did before."

"I have no doubt of it!"

"I was so sick of the telephone that when it rang at my end I nearly didn't pick it up. I had almost forgotten that telephones were two-way. A telephone was just a sort of quiz instrument that I could plug into offices all over the country. I stared at it for a while before I realised that it was after all a mutual affair and that someone was trying to call me for a change."

"And it was Ramsden."

"Yes, it was Alec Ramsden. He said: 'We've got him. He buys porcelain and stuff for Brayne, Havard and Co.' "

"I am glad it was Ramsden who unearthed him. It will comfort him for his failure to run down the girl."

"Yes, he's feeling better about it now. After that it was a rush to interview the people we needed and to obtain subpoenas and what not. But the whole lovely result will be waiting for us in the court at Norton tomorrow. Kevin can hardly wait. His mouth waters at the prospect."

"If it was ever in my power to be sorry for that girl," Mrs. Sharpe said, coming in with an over-night bag and dumping it on a mahogany wall-table in a way that would have turned Aunt Lin faint, "it would be in a witness-box facing a hostile Kevin Macdermott." Robert noticed that the bag, which had originally been a very elegant and expensive one—a relic of her prosperous early married life, perhaps—was now deplorably shabby. He decided that when he married Marion his present to the bride's mother would be a dressing-case; small, light, elegant and expensive.

"It will never be in my power," Marion said, "to have even a passing sensation of sorrow for that girl. I would swat her off the earth's face as I would swat a moth in a cupboard—except that I am always sorry about the moth."

"What had the girl intended to do?" Mrs. Sharpe asked. "Had she intended to go back to her people at all?"

"I don't think so," Robert said. "I think she was still filled with rage and resentment at ceasing to be the centre of interest at 39 Meadowside Lane. It is as Kevin said long ago: crime begins in egotism; inordinate vanity. A normal girl, even an emotional adolescent, might be heartbroken that her adopted brother no longer considered her the most important thing in his life; but she would work it out in sobs, or sulks, or being difficult, or deciding that she was going to renounce the world and go into a convent, or half a dozen other methods that the adolescent uses in the process of adjustment. But with an egotism like Betty Kane's there is no adjustment. She expects the world to adjust itself to her. The criminal always does, by the way. There was never a criminal who didn't consider himself ill-done-by."

"A charming creature," Mrs. Sharpe said.

"Yes. Even the Bishop of Larborough would find some difficulty in thinking up a case for her. His usual 'environment' hobby-horse is no good this time. Betty Kane had everything that he recommends for the cure of the criminal: love, freedom to

develop her talents, education, security. It's quite a poser for his lordship when you come to consider it, because he doesn't believe in heredity. He thinks that criminals are made, and therefore can be unmade. 'Bad blood' is just an old superstition, in the Bishop's estimation."

"Toby Bryne," Mrs. Sharpe said with a snort. "You should have heard Charles's stable lads on him."

"I've heard Nevil," Robert said. "I doubt if anyone could improve on Nevil's version of the subject."

"Is the engagement definitely broken, then?" Marion asked.

"Definitely. Aunt Lin has hopes of the eldest Whittaker girl. She is a niece of Lady Mountleven, and a grand-daughter of Karr's Krisps."

Marion laughed with him. "Is she nice, the Whittaker girl?" she asked.

"Yes. Fair, pretty, well-brought-up, musical but doesn't sing."

"I should like Nevil to get a nice wife. All he needs is some permanent interest of his own. A focus for his energies and his emotions."

"At the moment the focus for both is The Franchise."

"I know. He has been a dear to us. Well, I suppose it is time that we were going. If anyone had told me last week that I should be leaving The Franchise to go to a triumph at Norton I wouldn't have believed it. Poor Stanley can sleep in his own bed from now on, instead of guarding a couple of hags in a lonely house."

"Isn't he sleeping here tonight?" Robert asked.

"No. Why should he?"

"I don't know. I don't like the idea of the house being left entirely empty."

"The policeman will be round as usual on his beat. Anyhow, no one has even tried to do anything since the night they smashed our windows. It is only for tonight. Tomorrow we shall be home again."

"I know. But I don't much like it. Couldn't Stanley stay one more night? Until the case is over."

"If they want to wreck our windows again," Mrs. Sharpe said, "I don't suppose Stanley's being here will deter them."

"No, I suppose not. I'll remind Hallam, anyhow, that the house is empty tonight," Robert said, and left it there.

Marion locked the door behind them, and they walked to the gate, where Robert's car was waiting. At the gate Marion paused to look back at the house. "It's an ugly old place," she said, "but it has one virtue. It looks the same all the year round. At midsummer the grass gets a little burnt and tired-looking, but otherwise it doesn't change. Most houses have a 'best' time; rhododendrons, or herbaceous borders, or virginia creeper, or almond blossom, or something. But The Franchise is always the same. It has no frills. What are you laughing at, Mother?"

"I was thinking how bedizened the poor thing looks with those tubs of wallflower."

They stood there for a moment, laughing at the forbidding, dirty-white house with its incongruous decoration of frivolity; and laughing, shut the gate on it.

But Robert did not forget; and before having dinner with Kevin at The Feathers in Norton he called the police station at Milford and reminded them that the Sharpes' house would be empty for that one night.

"All right, Mr. Blair," the sergeant said, "I'll tell the man on the beat to open the gate and look round. Yes, we still have a key. That'll be all right."

Robert did not quite see what that would achieve; but then he did not see what protection could be afforded in any case. Mrs. Sharpe had said, if anyone was minded to break windows then the windows would inevitably be broken. He decided that he was being fussy, and joined Kevin and his law friends with relief.

The Law talks well, and it was late before Robert went to bed in one of the dark panelled rooms that made The Feathers famous. The Feathers—one of the "must" of American visitors to Britain—was not only famous but up to date. Pipes had been led through the linen-fold oak, wires through the beamed ceilings, and a telephone line through the oak planks of the floor. The Feathers had been providing comfort for the travelling public since 1480 and saw no reason why it should stop.

Robert fell asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow and the telephone at his ear had been ringing for some moments before he became aware of it.

"Well?" he said, still half-asleep. And became instantly wide awake.

It was Stanley. Could he come back to Milford? The Franchise was on fire.

"Badly?"

"It's got a good hold, but they think they can save it."

"I'll be over as soon as I can make it."

He made the twenty miles in a door-to-door time that the Robert Blair of a month ago would have considered reprehensible in the achievement of another, and quite inconceivable as an achievement of his own. As he tore past his own home at the lower end of Milford High Street and out into the country beyond, he saw the glow against the horizon, like the rising of a full moon. But the moon hung in the sky, a young silver moon in the pale summer night. And the glow of the burning Franchise wavered in sickening gusts that tightened Robert's heart with remembered horror.

At least there was no one in the building. He wondered if anyone had been there in time to rescue what was valuable from the house. Would there be anyone there who could distinguish what was valuable from what was worthless?

The gates were wide open and the courtyard—bright in the flames—was crowded with the men and machines of the Fire Service. The first thing he saw, incongruous on the grass, was the bead-work chair from the drawing-room; and a wave of hysteria rose in him. Someone had saved that, anyhow.

An almost unrecognisable Stanley grabbed his sleeve and said: "There you are. I thought you ought to know, somehow." Sweat trickled down his blackened face, leaving clear rivulets behind them, so that his young face looked seamed and old. "There isn't enough water. We've got quite a lot of the stuff out. All the drawing-room stuff that they used every day. I thought that's what they'd want, if it had to be a choice. And we flung out some of the upstairs stuff but all the heavy stuff has gone up."

Mattresses and bed-linen were piled on the grass out of the way of the firemen's boots. The furniture stood about the grass as it had been set down, looking surprised and lost.

"Let's take the furniture further away," Stanley said. "It's not safe where it is. Either some lighted bits will fall on it or one of those bastards will use it to stand on." The bastards were the Fire Service, doing their sweating and efficient best.

So Robert found himself prosaically carting furniture through a fantastic scene; miserably identifying pieces that he had known in their proper sphere. The chair that Mrs. Sharpe had considered Inspector Grant too heavy for; the cherry-wood table they had given Kevin luncheon at; the wall-table that Mrs. Sharpe had dumped her bag down on only a few hours ago. The roar and crackle of the flames, the shoutings of the firemen, the odd mixture of moonlight, head-lights, and wavering flame, the mad juxtaposition and irrelevance of the bits of furniture, reminded him of how it felt to be coming round from an anaesthetic.

And then two things happened together. The first floor fell in with a crash. And as the new spout of flame lit the faces round him he saw two youths alongside whose countenances were alive with gloating. At the same moment he became aware that Stanley had seen them too. He saw Stanley's fist catch the further one under the chin with a crack that could be heard even over the noise of the flames, and the gloating face disappeared into the darkness of the trampled grass.

Robert had not hit anyone since he gave up boxing when he left school, and he had no intention of hitting anyone now. His left arm seemed to do all that was necessary of its own accord. And the second leering face went down into obscurity.

"Neat," remarked Stanley, sucking his broken knuckles. And then, "Look!" he said.

The roof crumpled like a child's face when it is beginning to cry; like a melting negative. The little round window, so famous and so ill-reputed, leaned forward a little and sank slowly inwards. A tongue of flame leapt up and fell again. Then the whole roof collapsed into the seething mass below, falling two floors to join the red wreck of the rest of the interior. The men moved back from the furnace heat. The fire roared in unrestricted triumph into the summer night.

When at last it died away Robert noticed with a vague surprise that the dawn had come. A calm, grey dawn, full of promise. Quiet had come too; the roar and the shoutings had faded to the soft hiss of water on the smoking skeleton. Only the four walls stood, blurred and grimy, in the middle of the trampled grass. The four walls and the flight of steps with their warped iron railing. On either side of the doorway stood what remained of Nevil's gay little tubs, the soaked and blackened flowers hanging in unrecognisable shreds over their edges. Between them the square opening yawned into a black emptiness.

"Well," said Stanley, standing beside him, "that seems to be that."

"How did it begin?" asked Bill, who had arrived too late to see anything but the wreck that was left.

"No one knows. It was well alight when P.C. Newsam arrived on his beat," Robert said. "What became of those two chaps, by the way?"

"The two we corrected?" Stanley said. "They went home."

"It's a pity that expression is no evidence."

"Yes," Stanley said. "They won't get anyone for this any more than they got anyone for the window-breaking. And I still owe someone for a crack on the head."

"You nearly broke that creature's neck tonight. That ought to be some kind of compensation to you."

"How are you going to tell them?" Stanley said. This obviously referred to the Sharpes.

"God knows," Robert said. "Am I to tell them first and let it spoil their triumph in court for them; or am I to let them have their triumph and face the awful come-down afterwards?"

"Let them have their triumph," Stanley said. "Nothing that happens afterwards can take that away from them. Don't mess it up."

"Perhaps you are right, Stan. I wish I knew. I had better book rooms at the Rose and Crown for them."

"They wouldn't like that," Stan said.

"Perhaps not," Robert said, a shade impatiently. "But they have no choice. Whatever they decide to do they will want to stay here a night or two to arrange about things, I expect. And the Rose and Crown is the best available."

"Well," Stanley said, "I've been thinking. And I'm sure my landlady would be glad to have them. She's always been on their side, and she has a spare room, and they could have that sitting-room in front that she never uses, and it's very quiet down there, that last row of Council houses facing on the Meadows. I'm sure they'd rather have that than a hotel where they would be stared at."

"They would indeed, Stan. I should never have thought of it. You think your landlady would be willing?"

"I don't think; I'm sure. They're her greatest interest in life at the moment. It would be like royalty coming to stay."

"Well, find out definitely, would you, and telephone me a message to Norton. To The Feathers at Norton."

It seemed to Robert at least half Milford had managed to pack itself into the Court at Norton. Certainly a great many citizens of Norton were milling round the outer doors, vocal and frustrated; furious that when a case of national interest was being decided at "their" Assizes they should be done out of their right to witness it by an influx of foreigners from Milford. Wily and deceitful foreigners, too, who had suborned the Norton youth to keep places in the queue for them; a piece of forethought which had not occurred to Norton adults.

It was very warm, and the packed court stirred uneasily throughout the preliminaries and through most of Miles Allison's account of the crime. Allison was the antithesis of Kevin Macdermott; his fair, delicate face that of a type rather than a person. His light dry voice was unemotional, his method matter-of-fact. And since the story he was telling was one which they had all read about and discussed until it was threadbare, they withheld their attention from him and amused themselves by identifying friends in court.

Robert sat turning over and over in his pocket the little oblong of pasteboard that Christina had pressed into his hand on his departure yesterday, and rehearsing phrases for afterwards. The pasteboard was a bright Reckitt's blue and bore in gold letters the words: NOT A SPARROW SHALL FALL, and a picture in the right upper corner of a robin with an out-size red breast. How, wondered Robert, turning the little text over and over in his fingers, did you tell someone that they had no home any more?

The sudden movement of a hundred bodies and the subsequent silence brought him back to the court-room, and he realised that Betty Kane was taking the oath preparatory to giving evidence. "Never kissed anything but the book," Ben Carley had said of her appearance on a similar occasion. And that is what she looked like today. The blue outfit still made one think of youth and innocence; speedwell, and camp-fire smoke, and harebells in the grass. The tilted-back brim of her hat still showed the childish forehead with its charming hair line. And Robert, who knew now all about her life in the weeks she was missing, found himself being surprised all over again at sight of her. Plausibility was one of the first endowments of the criminal; but up to now such plausibility as he had had to deal with was of the old-soldier-ten-bob-note kind. Easily recognised for what it was. The work of amateurs at the job. It occurred to him that for the first time he was seeing the real thing at work.

Once again she gave her evidence in model fashion; her clear young voice audible to everyone in court. Once again she had her audience breathless and motionless. The only difference this time was that the Bench was not doting. The Bench, indeed, if one was to judge by the expression on the face of Mr. Justice Saye, was very far from doting. And Robert wondered how much the judge's critical gaze was due to natural distaste for the subject, and how much to the conclusion that Kevin Macdermott would not be sitting there ready to defend the two women in the dock unless they had a thundering good defence.

The girl's own account of her sufferings did what her counsel's had not done: roused the audience to an emotional reaction. More than once they had given vent to a united sigh, a murmur of indignation; never overt enough to rank as a demonstration, and so bring down the Court's rebuke, but audible enough to show which way their sympathies lay. So that it was in a charged atmosphere that Kevin rose to cross-examine.

"Miss Kane," began Kevin in his gentlest drawl, "you say that it was dark when you arrived at The Franchise. Was it *really* so dark?"

This question, with its coaxing tone, made her think that he did not want it to be dark, and she reacted as he intended.

"Yes. Quite dark," she said.

"Too dark to see the outside of the house?"

"Yes, much too dark."

He appeared to give that up and try a new tack.

"Then the night you escaped. Perhaps that was not quite dark?"

"Oh, yes. That was even darker, if possible."

"So that you could not possibly have seen the outside of the house on some occasion?"

"Never."

"Never. Well, having settled that point, let us consider what you say you could see from the window of your prison in the attic. You said in your statement to the police, when you were describing this unknown place where you were imprisoned, that the carriage-way from the gate to the door Vent straight for a little and then divided in two into a circle up to the door."

"Yes."

"How did you know it did that?"

"How did I know it? I could see it."

"From where?"

"From the window in the attic. It looked out on the courtyard in front of the house."

"But from the window in the attic it is possible to see only the straight part of the carriage-way. The edge of the roof cuts off the rest. How did you know that the carriageway divided in two and made a circle up to the door?"

"I saw it!"

"How?"

"From that window."

"You want us to understand that you see on a different principle from ordinary beings? On the principle of the Irishman's gun that shoots round corners. Or is it all done by mirrors?"

"It is the way I described!"

"Certainly it is the way you described; but what you described was the view of the courtyard as seen by, let us say, someone looking over the wall at it; not by someone looking at it from the window in the attic. Which you assure us was your only view of it."

"I take it," said the Court, "that you have a witness to the extent of the view from the window."

"Two, my lord."

"One with normal vision will be sufficient," said the Court dryly.

"So you cannot explain how, speaking to the police that day in Aylesbury, you described a peculiarity that you could not possibly have known about, if your story was true. Have you ever been abroad, Miss Kane?"

"Abroad?" she said surprised by the change of subject. "No."

"Never?"

"No, never."

"You have not, for instance, been to Denmark lately? To Copenhagen, for instance."

"No." There was no change in her expression but Robert thought that there was the faintest uncertainty in her voice.

"Do you know a man called Bernard Chadwick?"

She was suddenly wary. Robert was reminded of the subtle change in an animal that has been relaxed and becomes attentive. There is no alteration in pose; no actual physical change. On the contrary, there is only an added stillness; an awareness.

"No." The tone was colourless; uninterested.

"He is not a friend of yours."

"No."

"You did not for instance, stay with him at a hotel in Copenhagen?"

"No."

"Have you stayed with anyone in Copenhagen?"

"No, I have never been abroad at all."

"So that if I were to suggest that you spent those missing weeks in a hotel in Copenhagen, and not in an attic at The Franchise, I should be mistaken."

"Quite mistaken."

"Thank you."

Miles Allison, as Kevin had anticipated, rose to retrieve the situation.

"Miss Kane," he said, "you arrived at The Franchise by car."

"Yes."

"And that car, you say in your statement, was driven up to the door of the house. Now, if it was dark, as you say, there must have been side-lights on the car, if not headlights; which would illuminate not only the carriage-way but most of the courtyard."

"Yes," she broke in, before he could put it to her, "yes, of course I must have seen the circle then. I knew I had seen it. I knew it." She glanced at Kevin for a moment, and Robert was reminded of her face when she saw that she had guessed correctly about the suitcases in the cupboard, that first day at The Franchise. If she knew what Kevin had waiting for her, Robert thought, she would have no spare thought for a passing triumph.

She was succeeded in the witness-box by Carley's "oleograph"; who had bought both a new frock and a new hat for her appearance at Norton—a tomato-red frock and a puce hat with a cobalt ribbon and a pink rose—and looked more luscious and more revolting than ever. Again Robert was interested to note how her relish of her part discounted, even with this more emotional audience, the effect of what she said. They didn't like her, and in spite of their *parti pris* attitude their English distrust of malice cooled their minds towards her. When Kevin, cross-examining, suggested that she had in fact been dismissed and had not "given in her notice" at all, there was a So-that's-it! expression on every second face in court. Apart from an attempt to shake her credit, there was not much that Kevin could do with her, and he let her go. He was waiting for her poor stooge.

The stooge, when she arrived, looked even less happy than she had looked in the police court at Milford. The much more impressive array of robes and wigs clearly shook her. Police uniforms were bad enough, but in retrospect they seemed positively home-like compared with this solemn atmosphere, this ritual. If she was out of her depth in Milford, she was obviously drowning here. Robert saw Kevin's considering eye on her, analysing and understanding; deciding on his approach. She had been scared stiff by Miles Allison, in spite of his patient quietness; evidently regarding anything in a wig and gown as hostile and a potential dispenser of penalties. So Kevin became her wooer and protector.

It was positively indecent, the caress that Kevin could get into his voice, Robert thought, listening to his first sentences to her. The soft unhurried syllables reassured her. She listened for a moment and then began to relax. Robert saw the small skinny hands that had been clutched so tightly together on the rail of the box slacken and spread slowly to a prone position. He was asking about her school. The fright had faded from her eyes and she was answering quite calmly. Here, she quite obviously felt, was a friend.

"Now, Gladys, I am going to suggest to you that you did not want to come here today and give evidence against these two people at The Franchise."

"No, I didn't. Indeed I didn't!"

"But you came," he said; not accusing, just making the statement.

"Yes," she said; shamefaced.

"Why? Because you thought it was your duty?"

"No, oh no."

"Was it because someone forced you to come?"

Robert saw the judge's instant reaction to this, but so out of the tail of his eye did Kevin. "Someone who held something over your head?" finished Kevin smoothly, and his lordship paused. "Someone who said: 'You say what I tell you to say or I'll tell about you'?"

She looked half-hopeful, half-bewildered. "I don't know," she said, falling back on the escape of the illiterate.

"Because if anyone made you tell lies by threatening what they would do to you if you didn't, they can be punished for it."

This was clearly a new idea to her.

"This court, all these people you see here, have come here today to find out the truth about something. And His Lordship up there would deal very sternly with anyone who had used threats to make you come here and say something that was not true. What is more, there is a very heavy punishment for persons who take an oath to speak truth and tell what is not true; but if it so happened that they had been frightened into telling lies by someone threatening them, then the person who would be punished most would be the person who made the threats. Do you understand that?"

"Yes," she said in a whisper.

"Now I am going to suggest to you what really happened, and you will tell me whether I am right." He waited for her agreement, but she said nothing, so he went on. "Someone—a friend of yours, perhaps—took something from The Franchise—let us say, a watch. She did not want the watch herself, perhaps, and so she handed it on to you. It may be that you did not want to take it, but your friend is perhaps a domineering person and you did not like to refuse her gift. So you took it. Now I suggest that presently that friend proposed to you that you should back up a story she was going to tell in court and you, being averse to telling lies, said no. And that she then said to you: 'If you don't back me up I shall say that you took that watch from The Franchise one day when you came to see me'—or some other threat of that sort."

He paused a moment but she merely looked bewildered.

"Now, I suggest that because of those threats you did actually go to the police court and did actually back up your friend's untrue story, but that when you got home you were sorry and ashamed. So sorry and ashamed that the thought of keeping that watch any longer was unbearable to you. And that you then wrapped up the watch, and sent it back to The Franchise by post with a note saying: 'I don't want none of it.' "He paused. "I suggest to you, Gladys, that that is what really happened."

But she had had time to take fright. "No," she said. "No, I never had that watch."

He ignored the admission, and said smoothly: "I am quite wrong about that?"

"Yes. It wasn't me sent back the watch."

He picked up a paper and said, still mildly: "When you were at that school we were talking about, you were very good at drawing. So good that you had things put up for show at the school exhibition."

"Yes."

"I have here a map of Canada—a very neat map—which was one of your exhibits and which indeed won you a prize. You have signed it here in the right-hand corner, and I have no doubt that you were proud to sign such a neat piece of work. I expect you will remember it."

It was taken across the court to her, while Kevin added:

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury, it is a map of Canada which Gladys Rees made in her last year at school. When his lordship has inspected it he will no doubt pass it on to you." And then, to Gladys: "You made that map yourself?"

"Yes."

"And wrote your name in the corner."

"Yes."

"And printed DOMINION OF CANADA across the bottom?"

"Yes."

"You printed those letters across the bottom that read: DOMINION OF CANADA. Good. Now I have here the scrap of paper on which someone wrote the words: I DON'T WANT NONE OF IT. This scrap of paper, with its printed letters, were enclosed with the watch that was sent back to The Franchise. The watch that had gone missing while Rose Glyn was working there. And I suggest that the printing of I DON'T WANT NONE is the same as the printing of DOMINION OF CANADA. That it was written by the same hand. And that that hand was yours."

"No," she said, taking the scrap of paper as it was handed to her and putting it hastily down on the ledge as though it might sting her. "I never. I never sent back no watch."

"You didn't print those letters that read: I DON'T WANT NONE OF IT?"

"No."

"But you did print those letters that read DOMINION OF CANADA?"

"Yes."

"Well, later in this case I shall bring evidence that these two printings are by the same hand. In the meantime the jury can inspect them at their leisure and arrive at their own conclusions. Thank you."

"My learned friend has suggested to you," said Miles Allison, "that pressure was brought on you to come here. Is there any truth in that suggestion?"

"No."

"You did not come here because you were frightened of what might happen to you if you didn't?"

She took some time to think over this, evidently disentangling it in her mind. "No," she ventured at last.

"What you said in the witness-box at the police court, and what you have said today, is the truth?"

"Yes."

"Not something that someone suggested you might say?"

"No."

But the impression that was left with the jury was just that: that she was an unwilling witness repeating a story that was someone else's invention.

That ended the evidence for the prosecution and Kevin went straight on with the matter of Gladys Rees; on the housewife principle of "getting his feet clear" before he began the real work of the day.

A handwriting expert gave evidence that the two samples of printing which had been put into court were by the same hand. Not only had he no doubt about it, but he had rarely been given an easier task. Not only were letters duplicated in the two samples but combinations of letters were similarly duplicated, combinations such as DO and AN and ON. As it was evident that the jury had already made up their minds for themselves on this point—no one who saw the two samples could doubt that they were by the same hand—Allison's suggestion that experts could be wrong was automatic and half-hearted. Kevin demolished it by producing his fingerprint witness, who deponed that the same fingerprints were to be found on each. And Allison's suggestion that the fingerprints might not be those of Gladys Rees was a last-stand effort. He had no wish that the Court might put it to the test.

Now that he had established the fact that Gladys Rees had, when she made her first declaration, been in possession of a watch stolen from The Franchise and had returned it immediately after that declaration, with a conscience-stricken note, Kevin was free to deal with Betty Kane's story. Rose Glyn and her story had been sufficiently discredited for the police to be already laying their heads together. He could safely leave Rose to the police.

When Bernard William Chadwick was called, there was a craning forward and a murmur of interrogation. This was a name that the newspaper readers did not recognise. What could he be doing in the case? What was he here to say?

He was here to say that he was a buyer of porcelain, fine china, and fancy goods of various kinds for a wholesale firm in London. That he was married and lived with his wife in a house in Ealing.

"You travel for your firm," Kevin said.

"Yes."

"In March of this year did you pay a visit to Larborough?"

"Yes."

"While you were in Larborough did you meet Betty Kane?"

"Yes."

"How did you meet her?"

"She picked me up."

There was an instant and concerted protest from the body of the court. Whatever discrediting Rose Glyn and her ally had suffered, Betty Kane was still sacrosanct. Betty Kane, who looked so much like Bernadette, was not to be spoken of lightly.

The judge rebuked them for the demonstration, involuntary though it had been. He also rebuked witness. He was not quite clear, he inferred, what "picking up" involved and would be grateful if the witness would confine himself to standard English in his replies.

"Will you tell the Court just how you did meet her," Kevin said.

"I had dropped into the Midland lounge for tea one day, and she-er-began to talk to me. She was having tea there."

"Alone?"

"Quite alone."

"You did not speak to her first?"

"I didn't even notice her.'

"How did she call attention to her presence, then?"

"She smiled, and I smiled back and went on with my papers. I was busy. Then she spoke to me. Asked what the papers were, and so on."

"So the acquaintance progressed."

"Yes. She said she was going to the flicks—to the pictures—and wouldn't I come too? Well, I was finished for the day and she was a cute kid so I said yes, if she liked. The result was that she met me next day and went out to the country in my car with me."

"On your business trips, you mean."

"Yes; she came for the ride, and we would have a meal somewhere in the country and tea before she went home to her aunt's place."

"Did she talk about her people to you?"

"Yes, she said how unhappy she was at home, where no one took any notice of her. She had a long string of complaints about her home, but I didn't take much notice of them. She looked a pretty sleek little outfit to me."

"A what?" asked the judge.

"A well-cared-for young girl, my lord."

"Yes?" Kevin said. "And how long did this idyll in Larborough persist?"

"It turned out that we were leaving Larborough on the same day. She was going back to her people because her holiday was over—she had already extended it so that she could run about with me—and I was due to fly to Copenhagen on business. She then said she had no intention of going home and asked me to take her with me. I said nothing doing. I didn't think she was so much of an innocent child as she seemed in the lounge at the Midland—I knew her better by that time—but I still thought she was inexperienced. She was only sixteen, after all."

"She told you she was sixteen."

"She had her sixteenth birthday in Larborough," Chadwick said with a wry twist of the mouth under the small dark moustache. "It cost me a gold lipstick."

Robert looked across at Mrs. Wynn and saw her cover her face with her hands. Leslie Wynn, sitting beside her, looked unbelieving and blank. "You had no idea that actually she was still fifteen." "No. Not until the other day." "So when she made the suggestion that she should go with you you considered her an inexperienced child of sixteen." "Why did you change your mind about her?" "She-convinced me that she wasn't." "Wasn't what?" "Inexperienced." "So after that you had no qualms about taking her with you on the trip abroad?" "I had qualms in plenty, but by then I had learned—what fun she could be, and I couldn't have left her behind if I had wanted "So you took her abroad with you." "Yes." "As your wife?" "Yes, as my wife." "You had no qualms about any anxiety her people might suffer?" "No. She said she still had a fortnight's holiday to come, and that her people would take it for granted that she was still with her aunt in Larborough. She had told her aunt that she was going home, but had told her people that she was staying on. And as they never wrote to each other it was unlikely that her not being in Larborough would become known to her people." "Do you remember the date on which you left Larborough?" "Yes; I picked her up at a coach stop in Mainshill on the afternoon of March the 28th. That was where she would normally have got her bus home. Kevin left a pause after this piece of information, so that its full significance should have a chance. Robert, listening to the momentary quiet, thought that if the courtroom were empty the silence could not be more absolute. "So you took her with you to Copenhagen. Where did you stay?" "At the Red Shoes Hotel." "For how long?" "A fortnight." There was a faint murmur of comment or surprise at that. "And then?" "We came back to England together on the 16th of April. She had told me that she was due home on the 16th. But on the way over she told me that she had actually been due back on the 11th and would now have been missing for four days." "She misled you deliberately?" "Yes." "Did she say why she had misled you?" "Yes. So that it would be impossible for her to go back. She said she was going to write to her people and say that she had a job and was quite happy and that they were not to look for her or worry about her.' "She had no compunction about the suffering that would cause parents who had been devoted to her?" "No. She said her home bored her so much she could scream." Against his will, Robert's eyes went to Mrs. Wynn, and came away again at once. It was crucifixion. "What was your reaction to the new situation?" "I was angry to begin with. It put me in a spot." "Were you worried about the girl?" "No, not particularly." "Why?" "By that time I had learned that she was very well able to take care of herself." "What exactly do you mean by that?" "I mean: whoever was going to suffer in any situation she created, it wouldn't be Betty Kane." The mention of her name suddenly reminded the audience that the girl they had just been hearing about was "the" Betty Kane. "Their" Betty Kane. The one like Bernadette. And there was a small uneasy movement; a taking of breath. "So?" "After a lot of rag-chewing-" "Of what?" said his lordship.

"A lot of discussion, my lord."

"Go on," said his lordship, "but do confine yourself to English, standard or basic."

"After a lot of talk I decided the best thing to do would be to take her down to my bungalow on the river near Bourne End. We used it for weekends in the summer and for summer holidays, but only rarely for the rest of the year."

"When you say 'we,' you mean your wife and you."

"Yes. She agreed to that quite readily, and I drove her down."

"Did you stay there with her that night?"

"Yes."

"And on the following nights?"

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"The following night I spent at home."
  "In Ealing."
  "Yes."
  "And afterwards?"
  "For a week after that I spent most nights at the bungalow."
  "Was your wife not surprised that you did not sleep at home?"
  "Not unbearably."
  "And how did the situation at Bourne End disintegrate?"
  "I went down one night and found that she had gone."
  "What did you think had happened to her?"
  "Well she had been growing very bored for the last day or two—she found housekeeping fun for about three days but not
more, and there wasn't much to do down there—so when I found she had gone I took it that she was tired of me and had found
someone or something more exciting."
  "You learned later where she had gone, and why?"
  "Yes."
  "You heard the girl Betty Kane give evidence today?"
  "Evidence that she had been forcibly detained in a house near Milford."
  "Yes."
  "That is the girl who went with you to Copenhagen, stayed there for a fortnight with you, and subsequently lived with you in
a bungalow near Bourne End?"
  "Yes, that is the girl."
  "You have no doubt about it?"
  "No."
  "Thank you."
  There was a great sigh from the crowd as Kevin sat down and Bernard Chadwick waited for Miles Allison. Robert wondered
if Betty Kane's face was capable of showing any emotion other than fear and triumph. Twice he had seen it pulse with triumph
and once—when old Mrs. Sharpe crossed the drawing-room towards her that first day—he had seen it show fear. But for all the
emotion it showed just now she might have been listening to a reading of Fat Stock prices. Its effect of inward calm, he decided,
must be the result of physical construction. The result of wide-set eyes, and placid brow, and inexpensive small mouth always set
in the same childish pout. It was that physical construction that had hidden, all those years, the real Betty Kane even from her
intimates. A perfect camouflage, it had been. A façade behind which she could be what she liked. There it was now, the mask, as
childlike and calm as when he had first seen it above her school coat in the drawing-room at The Franchise; although behind it
its owner must be seething with unnameable emotions.
  "Mr. Chadwick," Miles Allison said, "this is a very belated story, isn't it?"
  "Belated?
  "Yes. This case has been a matter for press-report and public comment for the past three weeks, or thereabouts. You must
have known that two women were being wrongfully accused—if your story was true. If, as you say, Betty Kane was with you
during those weeks, and not, as she says, in the house of these two women, why did you not go straight to the police and tell
them so?'
  "Because I didn't know anything about it."
  "About what?"
  "About the prosecution of these women. Or about the story that Betty Kane had told."
  "How was that?"
  "Because I have been abroad again for my firm. I knew nothing about this case until a couple of days ago."
  "I see. You have heard the girl give evidence; and you have heard the doctor's evidence as to the condition in which she
arrived home. Does anything in your story explain that?"
  "No."
  "It was not you who beat the girl?"
  "You say you went down one night and found her gone."
  "Yes."
  "She had packed up and gone?"
  "Yes; so it seemed at the time."
  "That is to say, all her belongings and the luggage that contained them had disappeared with her."
  "And yet she arrived home without belongings of any sort, and wearing only a dress and shoes."
  "I didn't know that till much later."
  "You want us to understand that when you went down to the bungalow you found it tidy and deserted, with no sign of any
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"Yes. That's how I found it."

When Mary Frances Chadwick was summoned to give evidence there was what amounted to a sensation in court even before she appeared. It was obvious that this was "the wife"; and this was fare that not even the most optimistic queuer outside the court had anticipated.

hasty departure."

Frances Chadwick was a tallish good-looking woman; a natural blonde with the clothes and figure of a girl who has "modelled" clothes; but growing a little plump now, and, if one was to judge from the good-natured face, not much caring.

She said that she was indeed married to the previous witness, and lived with him in Ealing. They had no children. She still worked in the clothes trade now and then. Not because she needed to, but for pocket-money and because she liked it. Yes, she remembered her husband's going to Larborough and his subsequent trip to Copenhagen. He arrived back from Copenhagen a day later than he had promised, and spent that night with her. During the following week she began to suspect that her husband had developed an interest elsewhere. The suspicion was confirmed when a friend told her that her husband had a guest at their bungalow on the river.

"Did you speak to your husband about it?" Kevin asked.

"No. That wouldn't have been any solution. He attracts them like flies."

"What did you do, then? Or plan to do?"

"What I always do with flies."

"What is that?"

"I swat them."

"So you proceeded to the bungalow with the intention of swatting whatever fly was there."

"That's it."

"And what did you find at the bungalow?"

"I went late in the evening hoping I would catch Barney there too—"

"Barney is your husband?"

"And how. I mean, yes," she added hastily, catching the judge's eye.

"Well?"

"The door was unlocked so I walked straight in and into the sitting-room. A woman's voice called from the bedroom: 'Is that you, Barney? I've been so lonely for you.' I went in and found her lying on the bed in the kind of negligée you used to see in vamp films about ten years ago. She looked a mess, and I was a bit surprised at Barney. She was eating chocolates out of an enormous box that was lying on the bed alongside her. Terribly nineteen-thirty, the whole set-up."

"Please confine your story to the essentials, Mrs. Chadwick."

"Yes. Sorry. Well, we had the usual exchange—"

"The usual?"

"Yes. The what-are-you-doing-here stuff. The wronged-wife and the light-of-love, you know. But for some reason or other she got in my hair. I don't know why. I had never cared very much on other occasions. I mean, we just had a good row without any real hard feelings on either side. But there was something about this little tramp that turned my stomach. So—"

"Please, Mrs. Chadwick!"

"All right. Sorry. But you did say tell it in my own words. Well, there came a point where I couldn't stand this floo—I mean, I got to a stage when she riled me past bearing. I pulled her off the bed and gave her a smack on the side of the head. She looked so surprised it was funny. It would seem no one had ever hit her in her life. She said: 'You hit me!' just like that; and I said: 'A lot of people are going to hit you from now on, my poppet,' and gave her another one. Well, from then on it was just a fight. I own quite frankly that the odds were all on my side. I was bigger for one thing and in a flaming temper. I tore that silly negligée off her, and it was ding-dong till she tripped over one of her mules that was lying on the floor and went sprawling. I waited for her to get up, but she didn't, and I thought she had passed out. I went into the bathroom to get a cold wet cloth and mopped her face. And then I went into the kitchen to make some coffee. I had cooled off by then and thought she would be glad of something when she had cooled off too. I brewed the coffee and left it to stand. But when I got back to the bedroom I found that the faint had been all an act. The little—the girl had lit out. She had had time to dress, so I took it for granted that she had dressed in a hurry and gone."

"And did you go too?"

"I waited for an hour, thinking Barney might come. My husband. All the girl's things were lying about, so I slung them all into her suitcase and put it in the cupboard under the stairs to the attic. And I opened all the windows. She must have put her scent on with a ladle. And then when Barney didn't come I went away. I must have just missed him, because he did go down that night. But a couple of days later I told him what I had done."

"And what was his reaction?"

"He said it was a pity her mother hadn't done the same thing ten years ago."

"He was not worried as to what had become of her?"

"No. I was, a bit, until he told me her home was only over at Aylesbury. She could quite easily cadge a lift that distance."

"So he took it for granted that she had gone home?"

"Yes. I said, hadn't he better make sure. After all, she was a kid."

"And what did he say in answer to that?"

"He said: 'Frankie, my girl, that "kid" knows more about self-preservation than a chameleon.' "

"So you dismissed the affair from your mind."

"Yes."

"But it must have come to your mind again when you read accounts of the Franchise affair?"

"No. It didn't."

"Why was that?"

"For one thing, I never knew the girl's name. Barney called her Liz. And I just didn't connect a fifteen-year-old school-girl who was kidnapped and beaten somewhere in the Midlands with Barney's bit. I mean, with the girl who was eating chocolates on my bed."

"If you had realised that the girls were identical, you would have told the police what you knew about her?"

"Certainly."

"You would not have hesitated owing to the fact that it was you who had administered the beating?"

"No. I would administer another tomorrow if I got the chance."

"I will save my learned friend a question and ask you: Do you intend to divorce your husband?"

"No. Certainly not."

"This evidence of yours and his is not a neat piece of public collusion?"

"No. I wouldn't need collusion. But I have no intention of divorcing Barney. He's fun, and he's a good provider. What more do you want in a husband?"

"I wouldn't know," Robert heard Kevin murmur. Then in his normal voice he asked her to state that the girl she had been talking about was the girl who had given evidence; the girl who was now sitting in court. And so thanked her and sat down.

But Miles Allison made no attempt to cross-examine. And Kevin moved to call his next witness. But the foreman of the jury was before him.

The jury, the foreman said, would like his lordship to know that they had all the evidence they required.

"What was this witness that you were about to call, Mr. Macdermott?" the judge asked.

"He is the owner of the hotel in Copenhagen, my lord. To speak to their having stayed there over the relevant period."

The judge turned inquiringly to the foreman.

The foreman consulted the jury.

"No, my lord; we don't think it is necessary, subject to your lordship's correction, to hear the witness."

"If you are satisfied that you have heard enough to arrive at a true verdict—and I cannot myself see that any further evidence would greatly clarify the subject—then so be it. Would you like to hear counsel for the defence?"

"No, my lord, thank you. We have reached our verdict already."

"In that case, any summing-up by me would be markedly redundant. Do you want to retire?"

"No, my lord. We are unanimous."

We had better wait until the crowd thins out," Robert said. "Then they'll let us out the back way."

He was wondering why Marion looked so grave; so unrejoicing. Almost as if she were suffering from shock. Had the strain been as bad as all that?

As if aware of his puzzlement, she said: "That woman. That poor woman. I can't think of anything else."

"Who?" Robert said, stupidly.

"The girl's mother: Can you imagine anything more frightful? To have lost the roof over one's head is bad—Oh, yes, Robert my dear, you don't have to tell us—" She held out a late edition of the *Larborough Times with* a Stop Press paragraph reading: THE FRANCHISE, HOUSE MADE FAMOUS BY MILFORD ABDUCTION CASE, BURNT TO THE GROUND LAST NIGHT. "Yesterday that would have seemed to me an enormous tragedy. But compared with that woman's calvary it seems an incident. What *can* be more shattering than to find that the person you have lived with and loved all those years not only doesn't exist but has never existed? That the person you have so much loved not only doesn't love you but doesn't care two hoots about you and never did? What is there *left* for someone like that? She can never again take a step onto green grass without wondering if it is bog."

"Yes," Kevin said, "I couldn't bear to look at her. It was indecent, what she was suffering."

"She has a charming son," Mrs. Sharpe said. "I hope he will be a comfort to her."

"But don't you see," Marion said. "She hasn't got her son. She has nothing now. She thought she had Betty. She loved her and was as sure of her as she loved and was sure of her son. Now the very foundations of her life have given way. How is she to judge, any longer, if appearances can be so deceptive? No, she has nothing. Just a desolation. I am bleeding inside for her."

Kevin slipped an arm into hers and said: "You have had sufficient trouble of your own lately without saddling yourself with another's. Come; they'll let us go now, I think. Did it please you to see the police converging in that polite casual way of theirs on the periurers?"

"No, I could think of nothing but that woman's crucifixion."

So she too had thought of it as that.

Kevin ignored her. "And the indecent scramble for a telephone that the Press indulged in the moment his lordship's red tail was through the door? You will be vindicated at great length in every newspaper in Britain, I promise you. It will be the most public vindication since Dreyfus. Wait here for me, while I get out of these. I shan't be a moment."

"I suppose we had best go to a hotel for a night or two?" Mrs. Sharpe said. "Have we any belongings at all?"

"Yes, quite a few, I'm glad to say," Robert told her; and described what had been saved. "But there is an alternative to the hotel." And he told them of Stanley's suggestion.

So it was to the little house on the outer rim of the "new" town that Marion and her mother came back; and it was in the front room at Miss Sim's that they sat down to celebrate; a sober little group: Marion, her mother, Robert, and Stanley. Kevin had had to go back to town. There was a large bunch of garden flowers on the table which had come with one of Aunt Lin's best notes. Aunt Lin's warm and gracious little notes had as little actual meaning as her "Have you had a busy day, dear?" but they had the same cushioning effect on life. Stanley had come in with a copy of the *Larborough Evening News* which carried on its front page the first report of the trial. The report was printed under a heading which read: ANANIAS ALSO RAN.

"Will you golf with me tomorrow afternoon?" Robert asked Marion. "You have been cooped up too long. We can start early, before the two-rounders have finished their lunch, and have the course to ourselves."

"Yes, I should like that," she said. "I suppose tomorrow life will begin again and be just the usual mixture of good and bad. But tonight it is just a place where dreadful things can happen to one."

When he called for her on the morrow, however, all seemed well with life. "You can't imagine what bliss it is," she said. "Living in this house, I mean. You just turn a tap and hot water comes out."

"It is also very educational," Mrs. Sharpe said.

"Educational?"

"You can hear every word that is said next door."

"Oh, come, Mother! Not every word!"

"Every third word," amended Mrs. Sharpe.

So they drove out to the golf course in high spirits, and Robert decided that he would ask her to marry him when they were having tea in the club-house afterwards. Or would there be too many people interrupting here, with their kind words on the result of the trial? Perhaps on the way home again?

He had decided that the best plan was to leave Aunt Lin in possession of the old house—the place was so much hers that it was unthinkable that she should not live there until she died—and to find a small place for Marion and himself somewhere else in Milford. It would not be easy, these days, but if the worst came to the worst they could make a tiny flat on the top floor of Blair, Hayward, and Bennet's. It would mean removing the records of two hundred years or so; but the records were rapidly arriving at museum quality and should be moved in any case.

Yes, he would ask her on the way home again.

This resolution lasted until he found that the thought of what was to come was spoiling his game. So on the ninth green he suddenly stopped waggling his putter at the ball, and said: "I want you to marry me, Marion."

"Do you, Robert?" She picked her own putter out of her bag, and dropped the bag at the edge of the green.

"You will, won't you?"

"No, Robert dear, I won't."

"But Marion! Why! Why not, I mean."

"Oh—as the children say, 'because.'

"Because why?"

"Half a dozen reasons, any one of them good by themselves. For one, if a man is not married by the time he is forty, then marriage is not one of the things he wants out of life. Just something that has overtaken him; like flu and rheumatism and income-tax demands. I don't want to be just something that has overtaken you."

"But that is—"

"Then, I don't think that I should be in the least an asset to Blair, Hayward, and Bennet. Even—"

"I'm not asking you to marry Blair, Hayward, and Bennet."

"Even the proof that I didn't beat Betty Kane won't free me of being 'the woman in the Kane case'; an uncomfortable sort of wife for the senior partner. It wouldn't do you any good, Robert, believe me."

"Marion, for heaven's sake! Stop-"

"Then, you have Aunt Lin and I have my mother. We couldn't just park them like pieces of chewing-gum. I not only love my mother, I *like* her. I admire her and enjoy living with her. You, on the other hand, are used to being spoiled by Aunt Lin—Oh, yes, you are!—and would miss far more than you know all the creature comforts and the cosseting that I wouldn't know how to give you—and wouldn't give you if I knew how," she added, flashing a smile at him.

"Marion, it is because you don't cosset me that I want to marry you. Because you have an adult mind and a—"

"An adult mind is very nice to go to dinner with once a week, but after a lifetime with Aunt Lin you would find it a very poor exchange for good pastry in an uncritical atmosphere."

"There is one thing you haven't even mentioned," Robert said.

"What is that?"

"Do you care for me at all?"

"Yes. I care for you a great deal. More than I have ever cared for anyone, I think. That is, partly, why I won't marry you. The other reason has to do with myself."

"With you?"

"You see, I am *not* a marrying woman. I don't want to have to put up with someone else's crochets, someone else's demands, someone else's colds in the head. Mother and I suit each other perfectly because we make no demands on each other. If one of us has a cold in the head she retires to her room without fuss and doses her disgusting self until she is fit for human society again. But no husband would do that. He would expect sympathy—even though he brought on the cold himself by pulling off clothes when he grew warm instead of waiting sensibly to get cool—sympathy and attention and feeding. No, Robert. There are a hundred thousand women just panting to look after some man's cold; why pick on me?"

"Because you are that one woman in a hundred thousand, and I love you."

She looked slightly penitent. "I sound flippant, don't I? But what I say is good sound sense."

"But, Marion, it is a lonely life—'

"A 'full' life in my experience is usually full only of other people's demands."

"-and you will not have your mother for ever."

"Knowing Mother as I do, I have no doubt that she will outlive me with perfect ease. You had better hole out: I see old Colonel Whittaker's four on the horizon."

Automatically he pushed his ball into the hole. "But what will you do?" he asked.

"If I don't marry you?"

He ground his teeth. She was right: perhaps her mocking habit of mind would not be a comfort to live with.

"What had you and your mother thought of doing now that you have lost The Franchise?"

She delayed over her answer, as if it were difficult to say. Fussing with her bag, and keeping her back to him.

"We are going to Canada," she said.

"Going away!"

She still had her back to him. "Yes."

He was aghast. "But Marion, you can't. And why to Canada?"

"I have a cousin who is a professor at McGill. A son of Mother's only sister. He wrote some time ago to ask Mother if we would go out to keep house for him, but by that time we had inherited The Franchise and were very happy in England. So we said no. But the offer is still open. And we—we both will be glad to go now."

"I see."

"Don't look so downcast. You don't know what an escape you are having, my dear."

They finished the round in a business-like silence.

But driving back to Sin Lane after having dropped Marion at Miss Sim's, Robert smiled wryly to think that to all the new experiences that knowing the Sharpes had brought to him was now added that of being a rejected suitor. The final, and perhaps the most surprising, one.

Three days later, having sold to a local dealer what had been saved of their furniture, and to Stanley the car he so much despised, they left Milford by train. By the odd toy train that ran from Milford to the junction at Norton. And Robert came to the junction with them to see them on to the fast train.

"I always had a passion for travelling light," Marion said, referring to their scanty luggage, "but I never imagined it would be indulged to the extent of travelling with an overnight case to Canada."

But Robert could not think of small-talk. He was filled with a misery and desolation that he had not known since his small soul was filled with woe at going back to school. The blossom foamed along the line side, the fields were burnished with buttercups, but the world for Robert was grey ash and drizzle.

He watched the London train bear them away, and went home wondering how he could support Milford without the hope of seeing Marion's thin brown face at least once a day.

But on the whole he supported it very well. He took to golfing of an afternoon again; and although a ball would always in the future be for him a "piece of gutta-percha," his form had not seriously deteriorated. He rejoiced Mr. Heseltine's heart by taking an interest in work. He suggested to Nevil that between them they might sort and catalogue the records in the attic and perhaps make a book of them. By the time Marion's goodbye letter from London came, three weeks later, the soft folds of life in Milford were already closing round him.

My very dear Robert (wrote Marion)

This is a hasty *au revoir* note, just to let you know that we are both thinking of you. We leave on the morning plane to Montreal the day after tomorrow. Now that the moment is almost here we have discovered that what we both remember are the good and lovely things, and that the rest fades to comparative insignificance. This may be only nostalgia in advance. I don't know. I only know that it will always be happiness to remember you. And Stanley, and Bill—and England.

Our united love to you, and our gratitude.

Marion Sharpe.

He laid the letter down on his brass and mahogany desk. Laid it down in the afternoon patch of sunlight.

Tomorrow at this time Marion would no longer be in England.

It was a desolating thought, but there was nothing to do but be sensible about it. What, indeed, was there to do about it? And then three things happened at once.

Mr. Heseltine came in to say that Mrs. Lomax wanted to alter her will again, and would he go out to the farm immediately. Aunt Lin rang up and asked him to call for the fish on his way home.

And Miss Tuff brought in his tea.

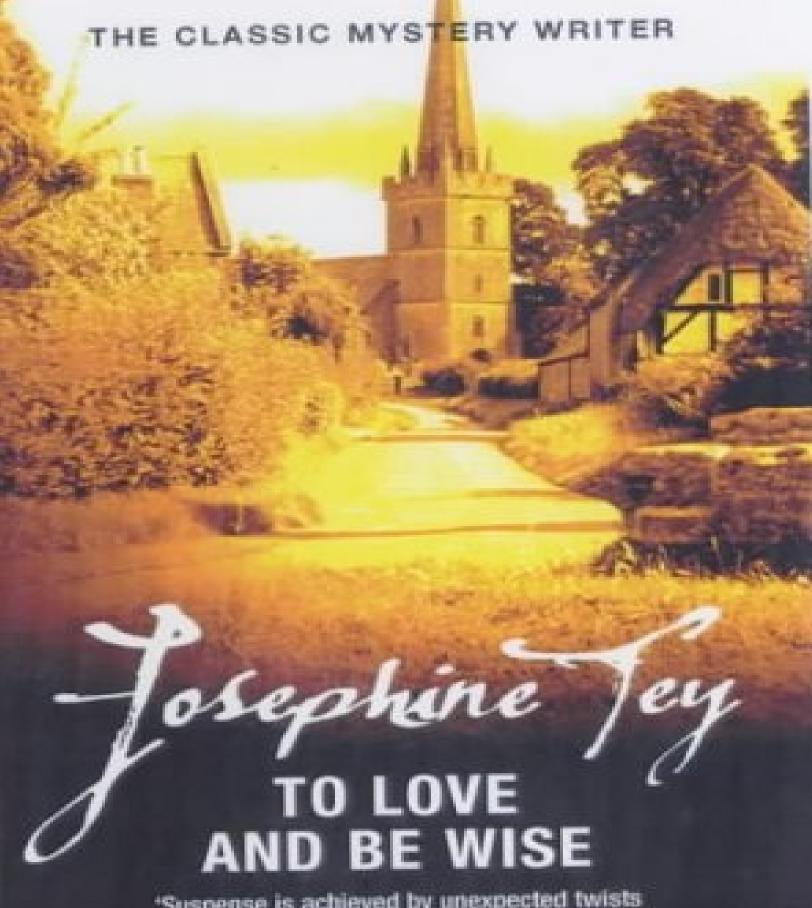
He looked for a long moment at the two digestive biscuits on the plate. Then, with a gentle finality, he pushed the tray out of his way and reached for the telephone.

Chapter 24

The summer rain beat on the air-field with a dreary persistence. Every now and then the wind would lift it and sweep the terminus buildings with it in one long brush-stroke. The covered way to the Montreal plane was open on either side and the passengers bent their heads against the weather as they filed slowly into it. Robert, moving up at the tail of the queue, could see Mrs. Sharpe's flat black satin hat, and the short strands of white hair being blown about.

By the time he boarded the plane they were seated, and Mrs. Sharpe was already burrowing her bag. As he walked up the aisle between the seats Marion looked up and saw him. Her face lighted with welcome and surprise.

- "Robert!" she said. "Have you come to see us off?"
- "No," Robert said. "I'm travelling by this plane."
- "Travelling!" she said, staring. "You are?"
- "It's a public conveyance, you know."
- "I know, but-you're going to Canada?"
- "I am."
- "What for?"
- "To see my sister in Saskatchewan," Robert said demurely. "A much better pretext than a cousin at McGill."
- She began to laugh; softly and consumedly.
- "Oh, Robert, my dear," she said, "you can't imagine how revolting you are when you look smug!"



'Suspense is achieved by unexpected twists and extremely competent story-telling...credible and convincing' Spectator Grant paused with his foot on the lowest step, and listened to the shrieking from the floor above. As well as the shrieks there was a dull continuous roar; an elemental sound, like a forest fire or a river in spate. As his reluctant legs bore him upwards he arrived at the inevitable deduction: the party was being a success.

He was not going to the party. Literary sherry parties, even distinguished ones, were not Grant's cup of tea. He was going to collect Marta Hallard and take her out to dinner. Policemen, it is true, do not normally take out to dinner leading actresses who gravitate between the Haymarket and the Old Vic; not even when the policemen are Detective-Inspectors at Scotland Yard. There were three reasons for his privileged position, and Grant was aware of all three. In the first place he was a presentable escort, in the second place he could afford to dine at Laurent's, and in the third place Marta Hallard did not find it easy to obtain escort. For all her standing, and her chic, men were a little afraid of Marta. So when Grant, a mere Detective-Sergeant then, appeared in her life over a matter of stolen jewellery, she had seen to it that he did not entirely fade out of it again. And Grant had been glad to stay. If he was useful to Marta as a cavalier when she needed one, she was even more useful to him as a window on the world. The more windows on the world a policeman has the better he is likely to be at his job, and Marta was Grant's 'leper's squint' on the theatre.

The roar of the party's success came flooding out through the open doors on to the landing, and Grant paused to look at the yelling crowd asparagus-packed into the long Georgian room and to wonder how he was going to pry Marta out of it.

Just inside the door, baffled apparently by the solid wall of talking and drinking humanity, was a young man, looking lost. He still had his hat in his hand, and had therefore just arrived.

'In difficulties? Grant said, catching his eye.

'I've forgotten my megaphone, the young man said.

He said it in a gentle drawl, not bothering to compete with the crowd. The mere difference in pitch made the words more audible than if he had shouted. Grant glanced at him again, approvingly. He was a very good-looking young man indeed, now that he took notice. Too blond to be entirely English. Norwegian, perhaps?

Or American. There was something in the way he said 'forgotten' that was transatlantic.

The early spring afternoon was already blue against the windows and the lamps were lit. Across the haze of cigarette smoke Grant could see Marta at the far end of the room listening to Tullis the playwright telling her about his royalties. He did not have to hear what Tullis was talking about to know that he was talking about his royalties; that is all Tullis ever talked about. Tullis could tell you, off-hand, what the Number Two company of his *Supper for Three* took on Easter Monday in Blackpool in 1938. Marta had given up even a pretence of listening, and her mouth drooped at the corners. Grant thought that if that D.B.E. did not come along soon Marta would be disappointed into the need for a face-lifting. He decided to stay where he was until he could catch her eye. They were both tall enough to see over the heads of a normal crowd.

With a policeman's ingrained habit of inspection he let his eye run over the crowd between them, but found nothing of interest. It was the usual collection. The very prosperous firm of Ross and Cromarty were celebrating the publication of Lavinia Fitch's twenty-first book, and since it was largely due to Lavinia that the firm was prosperous the drinks were plentiful and the guests were distinguished. Distinguished in the sense of being well-dressed and well-known, that is to say. The distinguished in achievement did not celebrate the birth of *Maureen's Lover*, nor drink the sherry of Messrs Ross and Cromarty. Even Marta, that inevitable Dame, was here because she was a neighbour of Lavinia's in the country. And Marta, bless her black-and-white chic and her disgruntled look, was the nearest thing to real distinction in the room.

Unless, of course, this young man whom he did not know brought more than good looks to the party. He wondered what the stranger did for a living. An actor? But an actor would not stand baffled at the edge of a crowd. And there was something in the implied comment of his remark about the megaphone, in the detachment with which he was watching the scene, that divorced him from his surroundings. Was it possible, Grant wondered, that those cheekbones were being wasted in a stockbroker's office? Or was it perhaps that the soft light of Messrs Ross and Cromarty's expensive lamps flattered that nice straight nose and the straight blond hair and that the young man was less beautiful in the daylight?

'Perhaps you can tell me, said the young man, still not raising his voice in emulation, 'which is Miss Lavinia Fitch?

Lavinia was the sandy little woman by the middle window. She had bought herself a fashionable hat for the occasion, but had done nothing to accommodate it; so that the hat perched on her bird's-nest of ginger hair as if it had dropped there from an upper window as she walked along the street. She was wearing her normal expression of pleased bewilderment and no make-up.

Grant pointed her out to the young man.

'Stranger in town? he said, borrowing a phrase from all good Westerns. The polite formality of 'Miss Lavinia Fitch' could have come only from the U.S.A.

'I'm really looking for Miss Fitch's nephew. I looked him up in the book and he isn't there, but I hoped he'd be here. Do you happen to know him, Mr — ?

'Grant.

'Mr Grant?

'I know him by sight, but he isn't here. Walter Whitmore, you mean? 'Yes. Whitmore. I don't know him at all, but I want very much to meet him because we have-had, I mean-a great friend in common. I was sure he'd be here. You're quite sure he isn't? After all, it's quite a party.

'He isn't in this room; I know that, because Whitmore is as tall as I am. But he may still be around somewhere. Look, you had better come and meet Miss Fitch. I suppose we can get through the barricade if we have the determination.

'You lean and I'll squirm, said the young man, referring to their respective build. 'This is very kind of you, Mr Grant, he said as they came up for air half-way, wedged tightly together between the hedged elbows and shoulders of their fellows; and he laughed up at the helpless Grant. And Grant was suddenly disconcerted. So disconcerted that he turned immediately and continued his struggle through the jungle to the clearing at the middle window where Lavinia Fitch was standing.

'Miss Fitch, he said, 'here is a young man who wants to meet you. He is trying to get in touch with your nephew.

'With Walter? said Lavinia, her peaked little face losing its muzzy expression of general benevolence and sharpening to real interest.

'My name is Searle, Miss Fitch. I'm over from the States on holiday and I wanted to meet Walter because Cooney Wiggin was a friend of mine too.

'Cooney! You are a friend of Cooney's? Oh, Walter will be delighted, my dear, simply delighted. Oh, what a nice surprise in the middle of this-I mean, so unexpected. Walter *will* be pleased. Searle, did you say?

'Yes. Leslie Searle. I couldn't find Walter in the book —

'No, he has just a pied-a-terre in town. He lives down at Salcott St Mary like the rest of us. Where he has the farm, you know. The farm he broadcasts about. At least it's my farm but he runs it and talks about it and-dash;. He's broadcasting this afternoon, that is why he isn't coming to the party. But you must come down and stay. Come down this weekend. Come back with us this afternoon.

'But you don't know if Walter —

'You don't have any engagements for the weekend, do you?

'No. No, I haven't. But —

'Well, then. Walter is going straight back from the studio, but you can come with Liz and me in our car and we'll surprise him. Liz! Liz, dear, where are you? Where are you staying, Mr Searle?

'I'm at the Westmorland.

'Well, what could be handier. Liz! Where is Liz?

'Here, Aunt Lavinia.

'Liz, dear, this is Leslie Searle, who is coming back with us for the weekend. He wants to meet Walter because they were both friends of Cooney's. And this is Friday, and we are all going to be at Salcott over the weekend recovering from this-being nice and quiet and peaceful, so what could be more appropriate. So, Liz dear, you take him round to the Westmorland and help him pack and then come back for me, will you? By that time this-the party will surely be over, and you can pick me up and we'll go back to Salcott together and surprise Walter.

Grant saw the interest in the young man's face as he looked at Liz Garrowby, and wondered a little. Liz was a small plain girl with a sallow face. True, she had remarkable eyes; speedwell blue and surprising; and she had the kind of face a man might want to live with; she was a nice girl, Liz. But she was not the type of girl at whom young men look with instant attention. Perhaps it was just that Searle had heard rumours of her engagement, and was identifying her as Walter Whitmore's fiancee.

He lost interest in the Fitch menage as he saw that Marta had spotted him. He indicated that he would meet her at the door, and plunged once more into the suffocating depths. Marta, being the more ruthless of the two, did the double distance in half the time and was waiting for him in the doorway.

'Who is the beautiful young man? she asked, looking backwards as they moved to the stairs.

'He came looking for Walter Whitmore. He says he's a friend of Cooney Wiggin.

'Says? repeated Marta, being caustic not about the young man but about Grant.

'The police mind, Grant said apologetically.

'And who is Cooney Wiggin, anyhow?

'Cooney was one of the best-known press photographers in the States. He was killed while photographing one of those Balkan flare-ups a year or two ago.

'You know everything, don't you.

It was on the tip of Grant's tongue to say: 'Anyone but an actress would have known that, but he liked Marta. Instead he said: 'He is going down to Salcott for the weekend, I understand.

'The beautiful young man? Well, well. I hope Lavinia knows what she is doing.

'What is wrong with having him down?

'I don't know, but it seems to me to be taking risks with their luck.

'Luck'

'Everything has worked out the way they wanted it to, hasn't it? Walter saved from Marguerite Merriam and settling down to marry Liz; all family together in the old homestead and too cosy for words. No time to go introducing disconcertingly beautiful young men into the menage, it seems to me.

'Disconcerting, murmured Grant, wondering again what had disconcerted him about Searle. Mere good looks could not have been responsible. Policemen are not impressed by good looks.

'I wager that Emma takes one look at him and gets him out of the house directly after breakfast on Monday morning, Marta said. 'Her darling Liz is going to marry Walter, and nothing is going to stop that if Emma has anything to do with it.

'Liz Garrowby doesn't look very impressionable to me. I don't see why Mrs Garrowby should worry.

'Don't you indeed. That boy was making an impression on me in thirty seconds flat and a range of twenty yards, and I'm considered practically incombustible. Besides, I never believed that Liz really fell in love with that stick. She just wanted to bind up his broken heart.

'Was it badly broken?

'Considerably shaken, I should say. Naturally.

'Did you ever act with Marguerite Merriam?

'Oh, yes. More than once. We were together for quite a lengthy run in Walk in Darkness. There's a taxi coming,

'Taxi! What did you think of her?

'Marguerite? Oh, she was mad, of course.

'How mad?

'Ten tenths.

'In what way?

'You mean how did it take her? Oh, a complete indifference to everything but the thing she wanted at the moment.

That isn't madness; that is merely the criminal mind at its simplest.

'Well, you ought to know, my dear. Perhaps she was a criminal manque. What is quite certain is that she was as mad as a hatter and I wouldn't wish even Walter Whitmore a fate like being married to her.

'Why do you dislike the British Public's bright boy so much?

'My dear, I hate the way he *yearns*. It was bad enough when he was yearning over the thyme on an Aegean hillside with the bullets zipping past his ears-he never failed to let us hear the bullets: I always suspected that he did it by cracking a whip —

'Marta, you shock me.

'I don't, my dear; not one little bit. You know as well as I do. When we were *all* being shot at, Walter took care that he was safe in a nice fuggy office fifty feet underground. Then when it was once more unique to be in danger, up comes Walter from his little safe office and sits himself on a thymey hillside with a microphone and a whip to make bullet noises with.

'I see that I shall have to bail you out, one of these days.

'Homicide?

'No; criminal libel.

'Do you need bail for that? I thought it was one of those nice gentlemanly things that you are just summonsed for.

Grant thought how independable Malta's ignorances were.

'It might still be homicide, though, Marta said, in the cooing, considering voice that was her trade-mark on the stage. 'I could just stand the thyme and the bullets, but now that he has taken a ninety-nine years' lease of the spring corn, and the woodpeckers, and things, he amounts to a public menace.

'Why do you listen to him?

'Well, there's a dreadful fascination about it, you know. One thinks: Well, that's the absolute sky-limit of awfulness, than which *nothing* could be worse. And so next week you listen to see if it really *can* be worse. It's a snare. It's so awful that you can't even switch off. You wait fascinated for the next piece of awfulness, and the next. And you are still there when he signs off.

'It couldn't be, could it, Marta, that this is mere professional jealousy?

'Are you suggesting that the creature is a *professional*? asked Marta, dropping her voice a perfect fifth, so that it quivered with the reflection of repertory years, and provincial digs, and Sunday trains, and dreary auditions in cold dark theatres.

'No, I'm suggesting that he is an actor. A quite natural and unconscious actor, who has made himself a household word in a few years without doing any noticeable work to that end. I could forgive you for not liking that. What did Marguerite find so wonderful about him?

'I can tell you that. His devotion. Marguerite liked picking the wings off flies. Walter would let her take him to pieces and then come back for more.

'There was one time that he didn't come back.

'Yes.

'What was the final row about, do you know?

'I don't think there was one. I think he just told her he was through. At least that is what he said at the inquest. Did you read the obituaries, by the way?

 ${\rm I}$ suppose I must have at the time. I don't remember them individually.

'If she had lived another ten years she would have got a tiny par in among the «ads» on the back page. As it was she got better notices than Duse. "A flame of genius has gone out and the world is the poorer." "She had the lightness of a blown leaf and the grace of a willow in the wind." That sort of thing. One was surprised that there were no black edges in the Press. The mourning was practically of national dimensions.

'It's a far cry from that to Liz Garrowby.

'Dear, nice Liz. If Marguerite Merriam was too bad even for Walter Whitmore, then Liz is too good for him. Much too good for him. I should be delighted if the beautiful young man took her from under his nose.

'Somehow I can't see your "beautiful young man" in the role of husband, whereas Walter will make a very good one.

'My good man, Walter will broadcast about it. All about their children, and the shelves he has put up in the pantry, and how the little woman's bulbs are coming along, and the frost patterns on the nursery window. She'd be much safer with-what did you say his name was?

'Searle. Leslie Searle. Absentmindedly he watched the pale yellow neon signature of Laurent's coming nearer.

'I don't think safe is the adjective I would apply to Searle, somehow, he said reflectively; and from that moment forgot all about Leslie Searle until the day when he was sent down to Salcott St Mary to search for the young man's body.

'Daylight! said Liz, coming out on to the pavement. 'Good clean daylight. She sniffed the afternoon air with pleasure. 'The car is round the corner in the square. Do you know London well, Mr-Mr Searle?

'I've been in England for holidays quite often, yes. Not often as early in the year as this, though.

'You haven't seen England at all unless you have seen it in the spring.

'So I've heard.

'Did you fly over?

'Just from Paris, like a good American. Paris is fine in the spring too.

'So I've heard, she said, returning his phrase and his tone. And then, finding the eye he turned on her intimidating, went on: 'Are you a journalist? Is that how you knew Cooney Wiggin?

'No, I'm in the same line as Cooney was.

'Press photography?

'Not Press. Just photography. I spend most of the winter on the Coast, doing people.

'The Coast?

'California. That keeps me on good terms with my bank manager. And the other half of the year I travel and photograph the things I want to photograph.

'It sounds a good sort of life, Liz said, as she unlocked the car door and got in.

'It's a very good life.

The car was a two-seater Rolls; a little old-fashioned in shape as Rolls cars, which last for ever, are apt to be. Liz explained it as they drove out of the square into the stream of the late afternoon traffic.

'The first thing Aunt Lavinia did when she made money was to buy herself a sable scarf. She had always thought a sable scarf the last word in good dressing. And the second thing she wanted was a Rolls. She got that with her next book. She never wore the scarf at all because she said it was a dreadful nuisance to have something dangling about her all the time, but the Rolls was a great success so we still have it.

'What happened to the sable scarf?

'She swopped it for a pair of Queen Anne chairs and a lawn-mower.

As they came to rest in front of the hotel she said: 'They won't let me wait here. I'll go over to the parking place and wait for you.

'But aren't you going to pack for me?

'Pack for you? Certainly not.

'But your aunt said you were to.

'That was a mere figure of speech.

'Not the way I figure it. Anyhow, come up and watch while I pack. Lend me your advice and countenance. It's a nice countenance.

In the end it was actually Liz who packed the things into his two cases, while he took them out of the drawers and tossed them over to her. They were all very expensive things, she observed; custom-made of the best materials.

'Are you very rich, or just very extravagant? she asked.

'Fastidious, let us say.

By the time they left the hotel the first street lamps were decorating the daylight.

'This is when I think lights look best, Liz said. 'While it is still daylight. They are daffodil yellow and magic. Presently when it grows dark they will go white and ordinary.

They drove back to Bloomsbury only to find that Miss Fitch had gone. The Ross part of the firm, sprawled in large exhaustion in a chair and thoughtfully consuming what was left of the sherry, roused himself to a shadow of his professional bonhomie to say that Miss Fitch had decided that there would be more room in Mr Whitmore's car and had gone over to the studio to pick him up when he had finished his half-hour. Miss Garrowby and Mr Searle were to follow them down to Salcott St Mary.

Searle was silent as they made their way out of London; from deference to the driver, Liz supposed, and liked him for it. It was not until green fields appeared on either hand that he began to talk about Walter. Cooney, it seemed, had thought a lot of Walter.

'You weren't in the Balkans with Cooney Wiggin, then?

'No, I knew Cooney back in the States. But he wrote me a lot in letters about your cousin.

'That was nice of him. But Walter isn't my cousin, you know.

'Not? But Miss Fitch is your aunt, isn't she?

'No. I'm no relation to any of them. Lavinia's sister-Emma-married my father when I was little. That's all. Mother-Emma, that ispractically surrounded him, if the truth must be told. He didn't have a chance. You see, she brought up Lavinia, and it was a frightful shock to her when Vinnie upped and did something on her own. Especially anything so outre as becoming a best-seller. Emma looked round to see what else she could lay hands on that would do to go broody about, and there was Father, stranded with a baby daughter, and simply asking to be arrested. So she became Emma Garrowby, and my mother. I never think of her as my «step», because I don't remember any other. When my father died, mother came to live at Trimmings with Aunt Lavinia, and when I left school I took over the job of her secretary. Hence the line about packing for you.

'And Walter? Where does he come in?

'He is the eldest sister's son. His parents died in India and Aunt Lavinia has brought him up since then. I mean, since he was fifteen, or so.

He was silent for a little, evidently disentangling this in his mind.

Why had she told him that, she wondered? Why had she told him that her mother was possessive; even if she had made it clear that she was possessive in the very nicest way? Was it possible that she was nervous? She, who was never nervous and never chattered. What was there to be nervous about? There was surely nothing disconcerting in the presence of a good-looking young man. Both as Liz Garrowby and as Miss Lavinia Fitch's secretary she had entertained a great many good-looking young men in her time, and had not been (as far as she could remember) greatly impressed.

She turned from the black polished surface of the arterial road into a side one. The last raw scar of new development had faded behind them, and they were now in an altogether country world. The little lanes ran in and out of each other, anonymous and irrelevant, and Liz picked the ones she wanted without hesitation.

'How do you choose? Searle asked. 'All these little dirt roads look alike to me.

'They look alike to me too. But I have done this trip so often that my hands do it for me, the way my fingers know the keys of a typewriter. I couldn't repeat the keys of a typewriter by trying to visualise them, but my fingers know where each key is. Do you know this part of the world?

'No, this is new to me.

'It's a dull county, I think. Quite featureless. Walter says that it is a constant permutation of the same seven «props»: six trees and a haystack. Indeed he says that there is a phrase in the county regiment's official march that says quite plainly: Six trees and a *hay*-stack! She sang the phrase for him. 'But where you see the bump in the road is the beginning of Orfordshire, and that is much more satisfying.

Orfordshire was in truth a satisfactory stretch of territory. In the growing dusk its lines flowed together in ever-changing combinations that were dream-like in their perfection. Presently they paused on the lip of a shallow valley and looked down on the dark smudge of roofs and the scattered lights of a village.

'Salcott St Mary, Liz said, introducing it. 'A once beautiful English village that is now occupied territory.

'Occupied by whom?

'By what the remaining natives call "they artist folk". It is very sad for them, poor things. They took Aunt Lavinia in their stride, because she was the owner of the "big house" and not part of their actual lives at all. And she has been here so long that she is almost beginning to belong. The big house has never been part of the village in the last hundred years, anyhow, so it didn't matter much who lived in it. The rot started when the mill house fell vacant, and some firm was going to buy it for a factory. I mean: to turn it into a factory. Then Marta Hallard heard about it and bought it to live in, right under the various lawyers' noses, and everyone was delighted and thought they were saved. They didn't much want an actress creature living in the mill house, but at least they weren't after all to have a factory in their nice village. Poor darlings, if they could only have foreseen.

She set the car in motion, and drove slowly along the slope, parallel with the village.

'I take it there was a sheep-track from London to here in about six months, Searle said.

'How did you know?

'I see it all the time on the Coast. Someone finds a good quiet spot, and before they've got the plumbing fixed they're being asked to vote for mayor.

'Yes. Every third cottage in the place has an alien in it. All degrees of wealth, from Toby Tullis-the play-*wright, you know-who has a lovely Jacobean house in the middle of the village street, to Serge Ratoff the dancer who lives in a converted stable. All degrees of living in sin, from Deenie Paddington who never has the same weekend guest twice, to poor old Atlanta Hope and Bart Hobart who have been living in sin, bless them, for the best part of thirty years. All degrees of talent from Silas Weekley, who writes those dark novels of country life, all steaming manure and slashing rain, to Miss Easton-Dixon who writes a fairy-tale book once a year for the Christmas trade.

'It sounds lovely, Searle said.

'It's obscene, Liz said, more hotly than she intended; and then wondered again why she should be so on edge this evening. 'And talking of the obscene, she said, pulling herself together, 'I'm afraid it is too dark for you to appreciate Trimmings, but the full flavour of it can keep till the morning. You can just get the general effect against the sky.

She waited while the young man took in the frieze of dark pinnacles and crenellations against the evening sky. 'The special gem is the Gothic conservatory, which you can't see in this light.

'Why did Miss Fitch choose this? Searle asked in wonder.

'Because she thought it was grand, Liz said, her voice warm with affection. 'She was brought up in a rectory, you know; the kind of rectory that was built circa 1850; so her eye became conditioned to Victorian Gothic. Even now, you know, she doesn't honestly see what is wrong with it. She knows people laugh at it, and she is quite philosophical about it, but she doesn't really know why they laugh. When she first brought Cormac Ross, her publisher, here, he complimented her on the appropriateness of the name, and she had no idea what he was talking about.

'Well, I'm in no mood to be critical, even of Victorian Gothic, the young man said. 'It was extraordinarily nice of Miss Fitch to have me down here without even stopping to look me up in the reference books. Somehow over in the States we expect more caution from the English.

'It isn't a matter of caution with the English; it's a matter of domestic calculation. Aunt Lavinia asked you down on the spur of the moment because she didn't have to do any domestic reckoning. She knows that there is enough spare linen to furnish a spare bed, and enough food in the house to feed a guest, and enough «labour» to provide for his comfort, and so she has no need to hesitate. Do you mind if we go straight round to the garage and take your things in through the side door. It's a day's march to the front door from the domestics' quarters, the baronial hall unfortunately intervening.

'Who built this and why? Searle asked, looking up at the bulk of the house as they skirted it.

'A man from Bradford, I understand. There was a very pleasant early Georgian house on the spot-there is a print of it in the gunroom-but he thought it a poor-looking object and pulled it down.

So it was through ugly passages, dimly lit, that Searle carried his luggage; passages that Liz said always reminded her of boarding-

school.

'Just drop them there, she said, indicating a service stair, 'and someone will take them up presently. Come through now to comparative civilisation and get warm and have a drink and meet Walter.

She pushed open a baize door and led him into the front of the house.

'Do you roller-skate? he asked, as they crossed the meaningless spaces of the hall.

Liz said that she hadn't thought of it, but that the place was, of course, useful for dances. 'The local hunt use it once a year, she said. 'Though you mightn't think it, it's less draughty than the Corn Exchange in Wickham.

She opened a door and they went from the grey spaces of Orfordshire and the dreary dim corridors of the house into warmth and firelight and the welcome of a lived-in room full of well-used furniture and scented with burning logs and narcissi. Lavinia was sunk in a chair with her neat little feet on the edge of the steel fender and her untidy mop of hair escaping from its pins all over the cushions. Facing her, with his elbow on the mantelpiece and one foot on the fender in his favourite attitude, was Walter Whitmore, and Liz saw him with a rush of affection and relief.

Why relief? she asked herself, as she listened to the greetings. She had known Walter would be here. Why relief?

Was it just that she could now hand over the social burden to Walter?

But social duties were her daily task and she took them in her stride. Nor could Searle be justly considered a burden. She had rarely met anyone so easy or so undemanding. Why this gladness to see Walter, this absurd feeling that now it would be all right? Like a child coming back from strangeness to a familiar room.

She watched the pleasure on Walter's face as he welcomed Searle; and loved him. He was human, and imperfect, and his face was already growing lined, and his hair showed signs of growing back above the temples, but he was Walter, and real; not-not something of inhuman beauty that had walked out of some morning of the world beyond our remembering.

She took pleasure in remarking that, face to face with Walter's tallness, the newcomer looked nearly short. And his shoes, for all their expensiveness were, from an English point of view, distinctly regrettable.

'After all, he's only a photographer, she said to herself, and was caught up by her own absurdity.

Was she so impressed by Leslie Searle that she needed protection against him? Surely not.

It was not uncommon to find that morning-of-the-world beauty among northern peoples; nor was it to be wondered at that it made one think of tales of the seal people and their strangeness. The young man was just a good-looking Scandinavian-American with a deplorable taste in shoes and a talent for using the right kind of lens. There was not the slightest need for her to cross herself, or utter charms against him.

Even so, when her mother asked him at dinner whether he had any family in England, she was conscious of a vague surprise that he should be possessed of anything so mundane as relations.

He had a girl cousin, he said; that was all.

'We don't like each other. She paints.

'Is the painting a non-sequitur? Walter asked.

'Oh, I like her painting well enough-what I've seen of it. It's just that we annoy each other, so we don't bother with one another.

Lavinia asked what she painted; was it portraits?

Liz wondered, while they talked, if she had ever painted her cousin. It must be nice to be able to take a brush and a box of paints and put on record for one's own pleasure and satisfaction a beauty that could otherwise never belong to one. To have it to keep and look at whenever one wanted to until one died.

'Elizabeth Garrowby! she said to herself. 'In no time at all you will be hanging up actor's photographs.

But no; it wasn't like that at all. It was no more reprehensible than loving a-than admiring a work of Praxiteles. If Praxiteles had ever decided to immortalise a hurdler, the hurdler would have looked just like Leslie Searle. She must ask him sometime where he went to school, and if he had ever run races over hurdles.

She was a little sorry to see that her mother did not like Searle. No one would ever suspect it, of course; but Liz knew her mother very well and could gauge with micrometer accuracy her secret reactions to any given situation. She was aware now of the distrust that seethed and bubbled behind that bland front, as lava seethes and bubbles behind the smiling slopes of Vesuvius.

In that she was, of course, right. When Walter had borne his guest away to show him his room, and Liz had gone to tidy for dinner, Mrs Garrowby had catechised her sister about this unknown quantity that she had unloaded on the household.

'How do you know that he ever knew Cooney Wiggin at all? she asked.

'If he didn't, Walter will soon find out, Lavinia said reasonably. 'Don't bother me, Em. I'm tired. It was an awful party. Everyone screaming their heads off.

'If his little plan is to burgle Trimmings, it will be too late tomorrow morning for Walter to find out that he didn't know Cooney at all. Anyone could say they knew Cooney. If it comes to that, anyone could say they knew Cooney and get away with it. There was practically no part of Cooney Wiggin's life that wasn't public property.

'I can't think why you should be so suspicious about him. We have often had people we didn't know anything about down here at a moment's notice —

'Indeed we have, Emma said grimly.

'And so far they have always been what they said they were. Why pick on Mr Searle for your suspicions?

'He is much too personable to be wholesome.

It was typical of Emma to shy at the word 'beauty', and to substitute a bastard compromise like 'personable'.

Lavinia pointed out that since Mr Searle was staying only till Monday the amount of unwholesomeness he could manage to disseminate was necessarily small.

'And if it is burglary you are thinking of, he's going to have a sad shock when he goes through Trimmings. I can't think, off-hand, of anything that is worth lugging as far as Wickham.

'There's the silver.

'Somehow I can't believe that anyone went to all the trouble of appearing at Cormac's party, and pretending to know Cooney, and asking for Walter, just to obtain possession of a couple of dozen forks, some spoons, and a salver. Why not just force a lock one dark night?

Mrs Garrowby looked unconvinced.

'It must be very useful to have someone who is dead when you want to be introduced to a family.

'Oh, Em, Lavinia had said, breaking into laughter as much at the sentence as at the sentiment.

So Mrs Garrowby sat and brooded darkly behind her gracious exterior. She was not afraid for the Trimmings silver, of course. She was afraid of what she called the young man's 'personableness. She distrusted it for itself, and hated it as a potential threat to her house.

But Emma did not, as Marta Hallard had prophesied, get the young man out of the house first thing on Monday morning. By Monday morning it was incredible to the inhabitants of Trimmings-all but Emma herself-that on the previous Friday they had never heard of Leslie Searle. There had never been any guest at Trimmings who had merged himself with the household as Searle did. Nor had there ever been anyone who intensified the life of each one of them to the same extent.

He walked round the farm with Walter, admiring the new brick paths, the piggery, and the separator. He had spent his school holidays on a farm, and was knowledgeable as well as receptive. He stood patiently in green lanes while Walter recorded in his little notebook a hedgerow sprout or a bird-note that would do for his broadcast next Friday. He photographed with equal enthusiasm the seventeenth-century honesty of the little farmhouse, and the surrealist irrelevance of Trimmings, and contrived to convey the essential quality of each. Indeed, his photographic comment on Trimmings was so witty that Walter after his involuntary laughter had a moment of discomfort. This amiable young man had more sides to him than were apparent in a discussion on husbandry. He had so taken for granted the boy's discipleship that it was as disconcerting to look at these photographs as if his shadow had suddenly spoken to him.

But he forgot the moment almost before it had passed. He was not an introspective person.

For the introspective Liz, on the other hand, life had become all of a sudden a sort of fun-fair. A kaleidoscope. A place where no surface ever stayed still or horizontal for more than a few seconds together. Where one was plunged into swift mock danger and whirled about in coloured lights. Liz had been falling in and out of love more or less regularly since the age of seven, but she had never wanted to marry anyone but Walter. Who was Walter, and different. But never in that long progression from the baker's roundsman to Walter had she been aware of anyone as she was aware of Searle. Even with Tino Tresca, of the yearning eyes and the tenor that dissolved one's heart like a melting ice, even with Tresca, craziest of all her devotions, it was possible to forget for minutes together that she was in the same room with him. (With Walter, of course, there was nothing remarkable in the fact that they should be sharing the same air: he was just there and it was nice.) But it was never possible to forget that Searle was in a room.

Why? she kept asking herself. Or rather, why not?

It had nothing to do with falling in love, this interest; this excitement. If, on Sunday night, after two days in his company, he had turned to her and said: 'Come away with me, Liz, she would have laughed aloud at so absurd a notion. She had no desire to go away with him.

But a light went out of the room with him, and sprang up again when he came back. She was aware of every movement of his, from the small mallet of his forefinger as it flicked the radio switch, to the lift of his foot as it kicked a log in the fireplace.

Why?

She had gone walking with him through the woods, she had shown him the village and the church, and always the excitement had been there; in his gentle drawling courtesy, and in those disconcerting grey eyes that seemed to know too much about her. For Liz, all American men were divided into two classes: those who treated you as if you were a frail old lady, and those who treated you as if you were just frail. Searle belonged to the first class. He helped her over stiles, and shielded her from the crowding dangers of the village street; he deferred to her opinion and flattered her ego; and, as a mere change from Walter, Liz found it pleasant. Walter took it for granted that she was adult enough to look after herself, but not quite adult enough to be consulted by Walter Whitmore, Household Word Throughout the British Isles and a Large Part of Overseas. Searle's was a charming reversal of form.

She had thought, watching him move slowly round the interior of the church, what a perfect companion he would have made if it were not for this pricking excitement; this sense of wrongness.

Even the unimpressionable Lavinia, always but semi-detached from her current heroine, was, Liz noticed, touched by this strange attraction. Searle had sat with her on the terrace after dinner on Saturday night, while Walter and Liz walked in the garden and Emma attended to household matters. As they passed below the terrace each time on their round of the garden, Liz could hear her aunt's light childlike voice babbling happily, like a little stream in the half-dark of the early moonrise. And on Sunday morning Lavinia had confided to Liz that no one had ever made her feel so *abandoned* as Mr Searle. 'I am sure that he was something very wicked in Ancient Greece, she said. And had added with a giggle: 'But don't tell your mother that I said so!

Against the entrenched opposition of her sister, her nephew, and her daughter, Mrs Garrowby would have found it difficult to rid Trimmings of the young man's presence; but her final undoing came at the hands of Miss Easton-Dixon.

Miss Easton-Dixon lived in a tiny cottage on the slope behind the village street. It had three windows, asymmetrical in their own right and in relation to each other, a thatched roof, and a single chimney, and it looked as if one good sneeze would bring the whole thing round the occupant's ears; but its aspect of disintegration was equalled only by its spick and span condition. The cream wash of the plaster, the lime-green paint of door and windows, the dazzling crispness of the muslin curtains, the swept condition of the redbrick path, together with the almost conscientious crookedness of everything that normally would be straight, made a picture that belonged by right to one of Miss Easton-Dixon's own fairytale books for Christmas.

In the intervals of writing her annual story, Miss Easton-Dixon indulged in handcrafts. In the schoolroom she had tortured wood with red-hot pokers. When pen-painting came in she had pen-painted with assiduity, and had graduated from that to barbola work. After a spell of sealing-wax, she had come to raffia, and thence to hand-weaving. She still weaved now and then, but her ingrained desire was not to create but to transform. No plain surface was safe against Miss Easton-Dixon. She would take a cold cream jar and reduce its functional simplicity to a nightmare of mock-Meissen. In times which have seen the disappearance of both the attic and the boxroom, she was the scourge of her friends; who, incidentally, loved her.

As well as being a prop of the Women's Rural Institute, a lavish provider of goods for bazaars, a devoted polisher of Church plate, Miss Easton-Dixon was also an authority on Hollywood and all its ramifications. Every Thursday she took the one o'clock bus into

Wickham and spent the afternoon having one-and-ninepence-worth at the converted Followers of Moses hall that did duty as a cinema. If the week's film happened to be something of which she did not approve-ukelele opus, for instance, or the tribulations of some blameless housemaid-she put the one-and-ninepence, together with the eight-penny bus fare, into the china pig on the mantelpiece, and used the fund to take her to Crome, when some film that she specially looked forward to was being shown in that comparative metropolis.

Every Friday she collected her *Screen Bulletin* from the newsagent in the village, read through the releases for the week, marked those she intended to view, and put away the paper for future reference. There was no bit player in two hemispheres that Miss Easton-Dixon could not give chapter and verse for. She could tell you why the make-up expert at Grand Continental had gone over to Wilhelm's, and the exact difference that had made to Madeleine Rice's left profile.

So that poor Emma, walking up the spotless brick path to hand in a basket of eggs on her way to Evensong, was walking all unaware into her Waterloo.

Miss Easton-Dixon asked about the party to celebrate the birth of *Maureen's Lover* and Lavinia Fitch's literary coming-of-age. Had it been a success?

Emma supposed so. Ross and Cromarty's parties always were. A sufficiency of drink was all that was ever necessary to make a party a success.

'I hear that you have a very good-looking guest this weekend, Miss Easton-Dixon said, less because she was curious than because it was against her idea of good manners to have gaps in the conversation.

'Yes. Lavinia brought him back from the party. A person called Searle.

'Oh, said Miss Easton-Dixon in absentminded encouragement, while she transferred the eggs to a tenpenny white bowl that she had painted with poppies and corn.

'An American. He says that he is a photographer. Anyone who takes photographs can say that he is a photographer and there is no one to deny it. It is a very useful profession. Almost as useful as «nurse» used to be before it became a matter of registration and reference books.

'Searle? Miss Easton-Dixon said, pausing with an egg in her hand. 'Not Leslie Searle, by any chance?

'Yes, said Emma, taken aback. 'His name is Leslie. At least that is what he says. Why?

'You mean Leslie Searle is here? In Salcott St Mary? How simply unbelievable!

'What is unbelievable about it? Emma said, on the defensive.

'But he is famous.

'So are half the residents of Salcott St Mary, Emma reminded her tartly.

'Yes, but they don't photograph the most exclusive people in the world. Do you know that Hollywood stars go down on their knees to get Leslie Searle to photograph them? It is something that they can't buy. A privilege. An honour.

'And, I take it, an advertisement, said Emma. 'Are we talking about the same Leslie Searle, do you think?

'But of course! There can hardly be two Leslie Searles who are American and photographers.

'I see nothing impossible in that, said Emma, a last-ditcher by nature.

'But of course it must be the Leslie Searle. If it won't make you late for Evensong we can settle the matter here and now.

'How?

'I have a photograph of him somewhere.

'Of Leslie Searle!

'Yes. In a *Screen Bulletin*. Just let me look it out; it won't take a moment. This really is exciting. I can't think of anyone more-more exotic-to find in Salcott of all places. She opened the door of a yellow-painted cupboard (decorated Bavarian-fashion with scrolls of stylised flowers) and disclosed the neat stacks of hoarded *Bulletins*. 'Let me see. It must be eighteen months ago-or perhaps two years. With a practised hand she thumbed down the edges of the pile, so that the date in the corner of each was visible for a moment, and picked two or three from the pile. 'There is a «contents» list on the outside of each, she pointed out, shuffling them on the table, 'so it doesn't take a moment to find what one wants. So useful. And then, as the required issue did not turn up at once: 'But if this is going to make you late, do leave it and come in on your way home. I shall look it out while you are in church.

But nothing would now have moved Emma from the house until she had seen that photograph.

'Ah, here it is! said Miss Easton-Dixon at last. "Lovelies And The Lens" it was called. I suppose one cannot expect style *and* information for threepence a week. However, if I remember rightly the article was more respect-worthy than the title. Here it is. These are samples of his work-that is a *very* clever one of Lotta Marlow, isn't it-and here, over the page, you see, is a self-portrait. Isn't that your weekend guest?

It was a photograph taken at an odd angle and full of odd shadows; a composition rather than a 'likeness' in the old sense. But it was unmistakably Leslie Searle. The Leslie Searle who was occupying the 'tower' bedroom at Trimmings. Unless, of course, there were twins, both called Leslie, both called Searle, both Americans, and both photographers; which was something at which even Emma baulked.

She skimmed through the article, which, as Miss Easton-Dixon had indicated, was a perfectly straight-forward account of the young man and his work and might equally well have come out of *Theatre Arts Monthly*. The article welcomed him back to the Coast for his annual stay, envied him being free of the world for the rest of the year, and commended his new portraits of the stars, more especially that of Danny Minsky in Hamlet clothes. 'The tears of laughter that Danny has wrung from us have no doubt blinded us to that Forbes-Robertson profile. It took Searle to show us that, they said.

'Yes, said Emma, 'that's — She had nearly said 'the creature' but stopped herself in time; 'that is the same person.

No, she said cautiously, she did not know how long he was staying-he was Lavinia's guest-but Miss Easton-Dixon should certainly meet him before he left if that were humanly possible.

'If not, said Miss Easton-Dixon, 'do please tell him how much I admire his work.

But that, of course, Emma had no intention of doing. She was not going to mention this little matter at home at all. She went to

Evensong and sat in the Trimmings pew looking placid and benevolent and being thoroughly miserable. The creature was not only 'personable', he was a personality, and by that much more dangerous. He had a reputation that for all she knew might vie with Walter's in worldly worth. He no doubt had money, too. It was bad enough when she had only his 'personableness' to fear; now it turned out that he was eligible as well. He had everything on his side.

If it had been possible to call up the powers of darkness against him, she would have done it. But she was in church and must use the means to hand. So she invoked God and all his angels to guard her Liz against the evils in her path; that is to say, against not inheriting Lavinia's fortune when the time came. 'Keep her true to Walter, she prayed, 'and I'll — . She tried to think of some bribe or penance that she could offer, but could think of none at the moment, so she merely repeated: 'Keep her true to Walter, with no inducement added and left it to the unselfish goodness of the Deity.

It did nothing to reassure her nor to bolster her faith in the Deity, to come on her daughter and Searle leaning on the little side gate into the Trimmings garden and laughing together like a pair of children. She came up behind them along the field path from the church, and was dismayed by some quality of loveliness, of youth, that belonged to their gaiety. A quality that was not apparent in any communion between Liz and Walter.

'What I like best is the yard or two of Renaissance before the bit of Border peel, Liz was saying. They were evidently at their favourite game of making fun of the Bradford magnate's folly.

'How did he forget a moat, do you think? Searle asked.

'Perhaps he started life digging ditches and didn't want to be reminded of them.

'It's my guess he didn't want to spend money on digging a hole just to put water in it. They're Yankees, aren't they, up there?

Liz 'allowed' that north-country blood had probably much in common with New England. Then Searle saw Emma and greeted her, and they walked up to the house with her, not self-conscious in her presence or stopping their game, but drawing her into it and sharing their delight with her.

She looked at Liz's sallow little countenance and tried to remember when she had last seen it so alive; so full of the joy of life. After a little she remembered. It was on a Christmas afternoon long ago, and Liz had experienced in the short space of an hour her first snow and her first Christmas tree.

So far she had hated only Leslie Searle's beauty. Now she began to hate Leslie Searle.

It was Emma's hope that Searle would go quietly away before any further evidences of desirableness were revealed to the family; but in that too she was bound to be frustrated. Searle had avowedly come to England for a holiday, he had no relations or intimate friends to visit, he had a camera and every intention of using it, and there seemed no reason why he should not stay at Trimmings and use it. His expressed intention, once he had seen the largely unspoiled loveliness of Orfordshire, was to find a good hotel in Crome and make that a centre for photographic foraging among the cottages and country houses of the neighbourhood. But that, as Lavinia swiftly pointed out, was absurd. He could stay at Trimmings, among his friends, and forage just as far afield and with as good results as he could at Crome. Why should he come back each night to a hotel room and the company of casual acquaintances in a hotel lounge, when he could return to a home and the comfort of his own room in the tower?

Searle would no doubt have accepted the invitation in any case, but the final makeweight was the suggestion that he and Walter might do a book together. No one could remember afterwards who first made the suggestion, but it was one that anyone might have made. It was from journalism that Walter had graduated to the eminence of radio commentator, and an alliance between one of Britain's best-known personalities and one of America's most admired photographers would produce a book that might, with luck, have equal interest for Weston-super-Mare and Lynchburg, Va. In partnership they could clean up.

So there was no question of Searle's departing on Monday morning, nor on Tuesday, nor on any specific day in a foreseeable future. He was at Trimmings to stay, it seemed. And no one but Emma found any fault with that arrangement. Lavinia offered him the use of her Rolls two-seater to take him round the country-it did nothing but lie in the garage, she said, when she was working-but Searle preferred to hire a small cheap car from Bill Maddox, who kept the garage at the entrance to the village. 'If I'm going nosing up lanes that are not much better than the bed of a stream, some of them, I want a car I don't have to hold my breath about, he said. But Liz felt that this was merely a way of declining Lavinia's offer gracefully, and liked him for it.

Bill Maddox reported well of him to the village-'no airs at all and can't be fooled neither; upped with the bonnet and went over her as if he was bred to the trade'-so that by the time he appeared in the Swan with Walter of an evening Salcott St Mary knew all about him and were prepared to accept him in spite of his reprehensible good looks. The Salcott aliens, of course, had no prejudice against good looks and no hesitation whatever in accepting him. Toby Tullis took one look at him and straightway forgot his royalties, the new comedy he had just finished, the one he had just begun, and the infidelity of Christopher Hatton (how had he ever been such a half-wit as to trust a creature of a vanity so pathological that he could take to himself a name like that!) and made a bee-line for the bench where Walter had deposited Searle while he fetched the beer.

'I think I saw you at Lavinia's party in town, he said, in his best imitation-tentative manner. 'My name is Tullis. I write plays. The modesty of this phrase always enchanted him. It was as if the owner of a transcontinental railroad were to say: 'I run trains.

'How do you do, Mr Tullis, said Leslie Searle. 'What kind of plays do you write?

There was a moment of silence while Tullis got his breath back, and while he was still searching for words Walter came up with the beer.

'Well, he said, 'I see you have introduced yourselves.

'Walter, said Tullis, deciding on his line and leaning towards Walter with empressement, 'I have met him!

'Met whom? asked Walter who always remembered his accusatives.

'The man who never heard of me. I have met him at last!

'And how does it feel? asked Walter, glancing at Searle and deciding yet once again that there was more in Leslie Searle than met the eye.

'Wonderful, my boy, wonderful. A unique sensation.

'If you care, his name is Searle. Leslie Searle. A friend of Cooney Wiggin.

Walter saw a shadow of doubt cross the fish-grey eye of Toby Tullis and followed the thought quite clearly. If this beautiful young man had been a friend of the very-international Cooney, then was it possible that he had never heard of the even-more-international Toby Tullis? Was it possible that the young man was taking him for a ride?

Walter set the beer mugs down, slid into the seat beside Searle, and prepared to enjoy himself.

Across the room he could see Serge Ratoff glaring at this new piece of grouping. Ratoff had at one time been the raison d'etre and prospective star of an embryo play of Toby Tullis's which was to be called *Afternoon* and was all about a faun. Unfortunately it had suffered considerable changes in the processes of birth and had eventually become something called *Crepuscule*, which was all about a little waiter in the Bois, and was played by a newcomer with an Austrian name and a Greek temperament. Ratoff had never recovered from this 'betrayal'. At first he had drunk himself into scintillations of self-pity; then he had drunk to avoid the ache of self-pity that filled him when he was sober; then he was sacked because he had become independable both at rehearsals and performance; then he reached the ultimate stage of a ballet dancer's downfall and ceased even to practise. So that now, vaguely but surely, the fatty tissue was blurring the spare tautness. Only the furious eyes still had the old life and fire. The eyes still had meaning and purpose.

When Toby ceased to invite him to the house at Salcott, Ratoff had bought the old stable next the village shop; a mere lean-to against the shop's gable end; and made it into a dwelling for himself. This had proved in a quite unexpected way his salvation, for his point of vantage next the only shop in the place had turned him from a mere reject of Toby's into a general purveyer of gossip to the community, and therefore a person in his own right. The villagers, lured by the childish quality in his make-up, treated him without the reservation that they used to the other aliens, employing to him the same tolerance that they used to their own 'innocents'. He was therefore the only person in the village who was equally free of both communities. No one knew what he lived on, or if he ever ate, as opposed to drinking. At almost any hour of the day he could be found draped in incorrigible grace against the post-office counter of the

shop, and in the evenings he drank at the Swan like the rest of the community.

In the last few months a rapprochement had taken place between him and Toby, and there were rumours that he was even beginning to practise again. Now he was glaring at this newcomer to Salcott, this unsmirched unblurred radiant newcomer, who had taken Toby's interest. In spite of 'betrayal' and downfall, Toby was still his property and his god. Walter thought with a mild amusement how scandalised poor Serge would be if he could witness the treatment to which his adored Toby was being subjected. Toby had by now discovered that Leslie Searle was a fellow who photographed the world's celebrities, and was therefore confirmed in his suspicion that Searle had known quite well who he was. He was puzzled, not to say wounded. No one had been rude to Toby Tullis for at least a decade. But his actor's need to be liked was stronger than his resentment, and he was putting forth all his charm in an effort to win over this so-unexpected antagonist.

Sitting watching the charm at work, Walter thought how ineradicable was the 'bounder' in a man's personality. When he was a child his friends at school had used the word 'bounder' loosely to describe anyone who wore the wrong kind of collar. But of course it was not at all like that. What made a man a bounder was a quality of mind. A crassness. A lack of sensitivity. It was something that was quite incurable; a spiritual astigmatism. And Toby Tullis, after all those years, stayed unmistakably a bounder. It was a very odd thing. With the possible exception of the Court of St James's, there was no door in the world that was not wide open to Toby Tullis. He travelled like royalty and was given almost diplomatic privileges; he was dressed by the world's best tailors and had acquired the social tricks of the world's best people; in everything but essence he was the well-bred man of the world. In essence he remained a bounder. Marta Hallard had once said: 'Everything that Toby does is just a little off-key, and that described it very well.

Looking sideways to see how Searle was taking this odd wooing, Walter was delighted to observe a sort of absentmindedness in Searle as he consumed his beer. The degree of absentmindedness was beautifully graded, Walter noticed; any more would have laid him open to the charge of rudeness and so put him in the wrong, any less might not have been obvious enough to sting Tullis. As it was, Toby was baffled into trying far too hard and making a fool of himself. He did everything but juggle with plates. That anyone should be unimpressed by Toby Tullis was a state of affairs not to be borne. He sweated. And Walter smiled into his beer, and Leslie Searle was gentle and polite and a little absentminded.

And Serge Ratoff continued to glare from the other side of the room.

Walter reckoned that he was two drinks short of making a scene, and wondered if they should drink up and go, before Serge joined them in a torrent of unintelligible English and unfathomable accusations. But the person who joined them was not Serge but Silas Weekley.

Weekley had been watching them from the bar for some time, and now brought his beer over to their table and greeted them. He came, as Walter knew, for two reasons: because he had a woman's curiosity, and because everything beautiful had for him the attraction of the repulsive. Weekley resented beauty, and it was not entirely to be held against him that he made a very large income indeed out of that resentment. His resentment was quite genuine. The world he approved of was, as Liz had said, 'all steaming manure and slashing rain'. And not even the clever parodies of his individual style had sufficed to ruin his vogue. His lecture tours in America were wild successes, not so much because his earnest readers in Peoria and Paduca loved steaming manure but because Silas Weekley looked the part so perfectly. He was cadaverous, and dark, and tall, and his voice was slow and sibilant and hopeless, and all the good ladies of Peoria and Paduca longed to take him home and feed him up and give him a brighter outlook on life. In which they were a great deal more generous than his English colleagues; who considered him an unmitigated bore and a bit of an ass. Lavinia always referred to him as 'that tiresome man who always tells you that he was at a board school', and held that he was just a little mad. (He, on his part, referred to her as 'the woman Fitch', as one speaking of a criminal.)

Weekley had come over to them because he could not keep away from the hateful beauty of Leslie Searle, and Walter caught himself wondering if Searle knew it. For Searle, who had been all gentle indifference with the eager Toby, was now engaged in throwing a rope over the antagonistic Silas. Walter, watching the almost feminine dexterity of it, was willing to bet that in about fifteen minutes Searle would have Silas roped and hog-tied. He glanced at the big bland clock behind the bar and decided to time him.

Searle did it with five minutes to spare. In ten minutes he had Weekley, resentful and struggling, a prisoner in his toils. And the bewilderment in Weekley's sunken eyes was greater than ever the bewilderment in Toby's fish-scale ones had been. Walter nearly laughed aloud.

And then Searle put the final touch of comedy to the act. At a moment when both Silas and Toby were doing their rival best to be entertaining, Searle said in his quiet drawl: 'Do forgive me, won't you, but I see a friend of mine, and got up without haste and walked away to join the friend at the bar. The friend was Bill Maddox, the garage keeper.

Walter buried his face in his beer mug and enjoyed the faces of his friends.

It was only afterwards, rolling it over in his mind to savour it, that a vague discomfort pricked him. The fun had been so bland, so lightly handled, that its essential quality, its ruthlessness, had not been apparent.

At the moment he was merely amused by the typical reactions of Searle's two victims. Silas Weekley gulped down what was left of his beer, pushed the mug away from him with a gesture of self-disgust, and went out of the pub without a word. He was like a man fleeing from the memory of some frowsy back-room embrace; a man sickened by his own succumbing. Walter wondered for a moment if Lavinia could possibly be right, and Weekley was after all a little mad.

Toby Tullis, on the other hand, had never known either retreat or self-disgust. Toby was merely deploying his forces for further campaigning.

'A little farouche, your young friend, he remarked, his eye on Searle as he talked to Bill Maddox at the bar.

Farouche was the last word that Walter would have used of Leslie Searle but he understood that Toby must justify his temporary overthrow.

'You must bring him to see Hoo House.

Hoo House was the beautiful stone building that stood so unexpectedly in Salcott's row of pink and cream and yellow gables. It had once been an inn; and before that, it was said, its stones had been part of an abbey farther down the valley. Now it was a show-piece of a quality so rare that Toby, who normally changed his dwelling-place (one could hardly say his home) every second year, had refused

all offers for it for several years now.

'Is he staying long with you?

Walter said that he and Searle planned to do a book together. They had not yet decided on the form of it.

'Gipsying Through Orfordshire?

'Something like that. I do the spiel and Searle does the illustrations. We haven't thought of a good central theme yet.

'A little early in the year to go gipsying.

'Good for photography, though. Before the county becomes clotted with greenery.

'Perhaps your young friend would like to photograph Hoo House, Toby said, picking up the two mugs and moving with admirable casualness to the bar with them.

Walter stayed where he was and wondered how many drinks Serge Ratoff had had since last he noticed him. He had been only two short of a row then, he had reckoned. Now he must be almost at explosion point.

Toby put the mugs on the counter, entered first into conversation with the landlord, then with Bill Maddox, and so quite naturally with Searle again. It was dexterously done.

'You must come and see Hoo House, Walter heard him say presently. 'It is very beautiful. You might even like to photograph it.

'Has it not been photographed? asked Searle, surprised. It was quite an innocent surprise; an astonishment that a thing so beautiful should be unrecorded. But what it conveyed to his hearers was: 'Is it possible that any facet of Toby Tullis's life has remained unpublicised?

This was the spark that ignited Serge.

'Yes! he shrieked, shooting out of his corner like a squib and sticking his furious small face within an inch of Searle's, 'it has been photographed! It has been photographed ten thousand times by the greatest photographers in the world and it does not need to be made cheap by any stupid amateur from a country that was stolen from the Indians even if he has a profile and dyed hair and no morals and a

'Serge! said Toby, 'shut up!

But the wild babble poured out of Serge's ravaged face without a pause.

'Serge! Do you hear! Stop it! Toby said, and pushed Ratoff lightly on the shoulder so as to urge him away from Searle.

This was the final touch, and Serge's voice rose into one high continuous stream of vituperation, most of it couched in mercifully unintelligible English but spattered liberally with phrases in French or Spanish and studded here and there with epithets and descriptions of a freshness that was delightful. 'You middle-west Lucifer! was one of the better ones.

As Toby's hand took him by the back of the collar to drag him away from Searle by force, Serge's arm shot out to where Toby's new-filled beer mug was waiting on the counter. He reached it a split second before Reeve, the landlord, could save it, grabbed it, and launched the whole contents into Searle's face. Searle's head moved sideways by instinct, so that the beer streamed over his neck and shoulder. Screaming with baffled rage, Serge lifted the heavy mug above his head to fling it, but Reeve's large hand closed on his wrist, the mug was prised out of his convulsive clutch, and Reeve said: 'Arthur!

There was no chucker-out at the Swan, since there had never been any need for one. But when any persuading had to be done, Arthur Tebbetts did it. Arthur was cattleman up at Silverlace Farm, and he was a large, slow, kind creature who would go out of his way to avoid treading on a worm.

'Come now, Mr Ratoff, Arthur said, enveloping with his Saxon bulk the small struggling cosmopolitan. 'There's no call to get fussed over little things. It's that there gin, Mr Ratoff. I've told you afore. That ain't no drink for a man, Mr Ratoff. Now you come with me, and see if you don't feel the better of a dose of fresh air. See if you don't.

Serge had no intention of going anywhere with anyone. He wanted to stay and murder this newcomer to Salcott. But there was never any successful argument against Arthur's methods. Arthur just put a friendly arm round one and leaned. The arm was like a limb of a beech tree, and the pressure was that of a landslide. Serge went with him to the door under pressure, and they went out together. Not for one moment had Serge stopped his torrent of accusation and offence, and not once as far as anyone knew had he repeated himself.

As the high babbling voice died into the outer air, the onlookers stirred into relief and conversation again.

'Gentlemen, said Toby Tullis, 'I apologise on behalf of the Theatre.

But it was not said lightly enough. Instead of being an actor's gay smoothing over of an awkward moment, it was Toby Tullis reminding them that he spoke for the English Theatre. As Marta had said: everything that Toby did was a little off-key. There was a murmur of amusement, but if anything his speech added to the village's embarrassment.

The landlord mopped Searle's shoulder with a glass-cloth, and begged him to come in behind and his missus would take some clean water to his suit and get the smell of the beer off it before it dried in. But Searle refused. He was quite amiable about it but seemed to want to get out of the place. Walter thought that he was looking a little sick.

They said good-evening to Toby, who was still explaining Serge's temperament in terms of the Theatre, and went out into the sweet evening.

'Does he often sound off like that? Searle asked.

'Ratoff? He has made scenes before, yes, but never such a violent one. I've never known him use physical means before.

They met Arthur, returning to his interrupted beer, and Walter asked what had become of the disturber.

'He run away home, Arthur said with his large smile. 'Went off like an arrow from a bow. He could beat a hare, that one. And went back to his drink.

'It's early for dinner yet, Walter said. 'Let us walk home by the river and up by the field-path. I am sorry about the row, but I expect that in your job you are used to temperaments.

'Well, I have been called things, of course, but so far nothing has actually been flung at me.

'I dare swear no one ever thought of calling you a middle-west Lucifer before. Poor Serge. Walter paused to lean on the bridge below the Mill House, and look at the reflection of the afterglow in the waters of the Rushmere. 'Perhaps the old saying is true and it is

not possible to love and be wise. When you are as devoted to anyone as Serge is to Toby Tullis, I expect you cease to be sane about the matter.

'Sane, said Searle sharply.

'Yes; things lose their proper proportions. Which, I take it, is a loss of sanity.

Searle was quiet for a long time, staring at the smooth water as it flooded so slowly towards the bridge and then was flicked under it with the sudden hysteria of water sucked round obstacles in its path.

'Sane, he repeated, watching the place where the water lost control and was sucked under the culvert.

'I'm not suggesting the fellow is mad, Walter said. 'He has just lost hold of common sense.

'And is common sense so desirable a quality?

'An admirable quality.

'Nothing great ever came out of common sense, Searle said.

'On the contrary. Lack of common sense is responsible for practically every ill in life. Everything from wars to not moving up in the bus. I see there is a light in the Mill House. Marta must be back.

They looked up at the pale bulk of the house glowing in the half-dark as a pale flower glows. A single light, still bright yellow in what was left of the daylight, starred the side that looked on the river.

'A light the way Liz likes them, Searle said.

'Liz?

'She likes them golden like that in the daylight. Before the dark turns them white.

For the first time Walter was forced into considering Searle in relation to Liz. It had not crossed his mind until now to consider them in relation to each other at all, since he was not in the least possessive about Liz. This unpossessiveness might have been accounted to him for virtue if it had not sprung directly from the fact that he took her for granted. If by some method of hypnotism the last dregs of Walter's subconscious could have been dragged to the surface, it would have been found that he thought that Liz was doing very well for herself. Even the shadow of such a thought would have shocked Walter's conscious mind, of course; but since he was entirely unself-analytical and largely unselfconscious (a quality that enabled him to perpetrate the broadcasts which so revolted Marta and endeared him to the British public), the farthest his conscious mind went was to hold it gratifying and proper that Liz should love him

He had known Liz so long that she had no surprises for him. He took it for granted that he knew everything about Liz. But he had not known a simple little fact like her pleasure in lights in the daytime.

And Searle, the newcomer, had learned that.

And, what was more, remembered it.

A faint ripple stirred the flat waters of Walter's self-satisfaction.

'Have you met Marta Hallard? he asked.

'No.

'We must remedy that.

'I have seen her act, of course.

'In what?

'A play called Walk in Darkness.

'Oh, yes. She was good in that. One of her best parts, I think, Walter said, and dropped the subject. He did not want to talk about *Walk in Darkness. Walk in Darkness* might be a Hallard memory, but it was one that held also Marguerite Merriam.

'I suppose we couldn't drop in now? Searle said, looking up at the light.

'It's a little too near dinner time, I think. Marta isn't the kind of person you drop in on very easily. That, I suspect, is why she chose the isolated Mill House.

'Perhaps Liz could take me down and present me tomorrow.

Walter had nearly said: 'Why Liz? when he remembered that tomorrow was Friday, and that he would be away all day in town. Friday was broadcast day. Searle had remembered that he would not be here tomorrow although he himself had forgotten. Another ripple stirred.

'Yes. Or we might ask her up to dinner. She likes good food. Well, I suppose we had better be getting along.

But Searle did not move. He was looking up the avenue of willows that bordered the flat pewter surface of the darkening water.

'I've got it! he said.

'Got what?

'The theme. The connecting link. The motif.

'For the book, you mean?

'Yes. The river. The Rushmere. Why didn't we think of that before?

'The river! Yes! Why didn't we? I suppose because it isn't entirely an Orfordshire river. But of course it is the perfect solution. It has been done repeatedly for the Thames, and for the Severn. I don't see why it shouldn't work with the smaller Rushmere.

'Would it give us the variety we need for the book?

'Indubitably, said Walter. 'It couldn't be better. It rises in that hilly country, all sheep and stone walls and sharp outlines; then there's the pastoral bit with beautiful farm houses, and great barns, and English trees at their best, and village churches like cathedrals; and then Wickham, the essence of English market towns, where the villein that marched from the town cross to speak to King Richard in London is the same man that prods today's heifer on to the train on its way to the Argentine. Walter's hand stole up to the breast pocket where he kept his notebook, but fell away again. 'Then the marshes. You know: skeins of geese against an evening sky. Great cloudscapes and shivering grasses. Then the port: Mere Harbour. Almost Dutch. A complete contrast to the county at its back. A town full of lovely individual building, and a harbour full of fishing and coastwise traffic. Gulls, and reflections, and gables. Searle, it's perfect!

'When do we start?

'Well, first, how do we do it?

'Will this thing take a boat?

'Only a punt. Or a skiff where it widens below the bridge.

'A punt, Searle said doubtfully. 'That's one of those flat duck-shooting things.

'Approximately.

'That doesn't sound very handy. It had better be canoes.

'Canoes!

'Yes. Can you manage one?

'I've paddled one round an ornamental pond when I was a child. That's all.

'Oh, well, at least you've got the hang of it. You'll soon remember the drill. How far up could we start, with canoes? Man, it's a wonderful idea. It even gives us our title. "Canoes on the Rushmere." A title with a nice swing to it. Like "Drums Along the Mohawk." Or "Oil for the Lamps of China".

'We shall have to tramp the first bit of it. The sheep-country bit. Down to about Otley. I expect the stream will take a canoe at Otley. Though, God help me, I don't anticipate being much at home in a canoe. We can carry a small pack from the source of the river-it's a spring in the middle of a field, I've always understood-down to Otley or Capel, and from there to the sea we canoe. "Canoes on the Rushmere". Yes, it sounds all right. When I go up to town tomorrow I'll go and see Cormac Ross and put the proposition to him and see what he is moved to offer. If he doesn't like it, I have half a dozen more who will jump at it. But Ross is in Lavinia's pocket, so we might as well make use of him if he will play.

'Of course he will, Searle said. 'You're practically royalty in this country, aren't you!

If there was any feeling in the gibe it was not apparent.

'I should really offer it to Debham's, Walter said. 'They did my book about farm life. But I quarrelled with them about the illustrations. They were dreadful, and the book didn't sell.

'That was before you took to the air, I infer.

'Oh, yes. Walter pushed himself off the bridge and began to walk towards the field-path and dinner. 'They did refuse my poems, after the farm book, so I can use that as a get-out.

'You write poems too?

'Who doesn't?

'I for one.

'Clod! said Walter amiably.

And they went back to discussing the ways and means of their progress down the Rushmere.

'Come up to town with me and see Ross, Walter said at breakfast next morning.

But Searle wanted to stay in the country. It was blasphemy, he said, to spend even one day in London with the English countryside bursting into its first green. Besides, he did not know Ross. It would be better if Walter put the proposition to Ross first, and brought him into the business later.

And Walter, though disappointed, did not stop to analyse the exact quality of his disappointment.

But as he drove up to town his mind was much less occupied than usual with the matter of his broadcast, and a great deal oftener than usual it strayed back to Trimmings.

He went to see Ross and laid before him the plans for *Canoes on the Rushmere*. Ross professed himself delighted and allowed himself to be beaten up an extra 2–1/2 per cent on a provisional agreement. But of course nothing could be settled, he pointed out, until he had consulted Cromarty.

It was popularly supposed that Ross had taken Cromarty into partnership for the fun of it; as a matter of euphony. He had been doing quite well for himself as Cormac Ross, as far as anyone could judge, and there seemed on the surface no reason to rope in a partner; more especially a partner as colourless as Cromarty. But Cormac Ross had sufficient West Highland blood in him to find it difficult to say no. He liked to be liked. So he engaged Cromarty as his smoke-screen. When an author could be received with open arms, the open arms were Cormac Ross's. When an author had regretfully to be turned down it was on account of Cromarty's intransigeance. Cromarty had once said to Ross in a fit of temper: 'You might at least let me *see* the books I turn down! But that was an extreme case. Normally Cromarty did read the books that he was going to be responsible for rejecting.

Now, faced with the offer of a book by the British Public's current darling, Ross used the automatic phrase about consulting his partner; but his round pink face shone with satisfaction, and he bore Walter off to lunch and bought him a bottle of Romanee-Conti; which was wasted on Walter, who liked beer.

So, full of good burgundy and the prospect of cheques to come, Walter went on to the studio and his mind once more began to play tricks on him and run away back to Salcott instead of staying delightedly in the studio as was its habit.

For half of his weekly time on the air Walter always had a guest. Someone connected with the Open Air; a commodity in which Walter had lately taken so much stock as to make it a virtual Whitmore monopoly. Walter compered the Open Air in the shape of a poacher, a sheep farmer from the back blocks of Australia, a bird watcher, a keeper from Sutherland, an earnest female who went round pushing acorns into roadside banks, a young dilettante who hunted with a hawk, and anyone else who happened to be both handy and willing. For the latter half of his time Walter merely talked.

Today his guest was a child who kept a tame fox, and Walter was dismayed to find himself disliking the brat. Walter loved his guests. He felt warm and protective and all-brothers-together about them; he never loved mankind so largely or so well as when he and his guests were talking together in his Half Hour. He loved them to the point of tears. And now it upset him to feel detached and critical about Harold Dibbs and his silly fox. Harold had a sadly under-developed jaw, he noticed, and looked regrettably like a fox himself. Perhaps the fox had stayed with him because it had felt at home. He felt guilty about having had this thought and tried to compensate by giving his voice more warmth than it would carry, so that his interest had a forced note. Harold and his fox were Walter's first failure.

Nor was the talk successful enough to blot out the memory of Harold. The talk was about 'What Earthworms do for England'. The 'for England' was a typical Whitmore touch. Other men might speak on the place of the Earthworm in Nature, and no one cared two hoots either about Nature or earthworms. But Walter pinned his worm on to a Shakespearean hook and angled gently with it, so that his listeners saw the seething legions of blind purpose turning the grey rock in the western sea into the green Paradise that was England. There would be fifty-seven letters tomorrow morning by the first available post from north of the Border, of course, to point out that Scotland too had her earthworms. But this was just so much additional evidence of Walter's drawing-power.

It was Walter's secret habit to speak to one particular person when broadcasting; a trick which helped him to achieve that unselfconscious friendliness which was his trade-mark. It was never a real person; nor did he ever visualise his imaginary hearer in detail. He merely decided that today he would talk to 'an old lady in Leeds', or 'a little girl in hospital in Bridgwater', or 'a lighthouse-keeper in Scotland'. Today for the first time he thought of speaking to Liz. Liz always listened to his broadcast, and he took it for granted that she would listen, but his imaginary listener was so much a part of his act that it had never occurred to him before to use Liz as the person he talked to. Now, today, some obscure need to bind Liz closely to him, to make sure that she was there, blotted out his 'pretence' listener, and he talked to Liz.

But it was not the success it should have been. The mere recollection of Liz wooed his mind from the script, so that he remembered last night by the river, and the darkening willows, and the single golden star in the side of the Mill House. A daffodil-pale light, 'the way Liz liked them'. And his attention wandered from the worms and from England and he stumbled over the words, so that the illusion of spontaneity was lost.

Puzzled and a little annoyed, but still not greatly disturbed, he signed the autograph books that had been sent to the studio for that purpose, decided what was to be done in the case of (a) a request for his presence at a christening, (b) a request for one of his ties, (c) nineteen requests to appear on his programme, and (d) seven requests for financial loans; and turned his face homewards. As an afterthought he turned back and bought a pound boot of chocolate dragees for Liz. As he tucked it into the glove compartment it occurred to him that it must be some time since he took Liz something on his way home. It was a pleasant habit; he must do it more often.

It was only when the traffic dropped behind him, and the Roman directness of the arterial highway stretched uneventful in front of

him that his mind went past Liz to the thing her image was hiding: Searle. Searle. Poor Serge's 'middle-west Lucifer'. Why Lucifer, he wondered? Lucifer, Prince of the Morning. He had always pictured Lucifer as a magnificent, burning figure six-and-a-half feet tall. Not at all like Searle. What in Searle had suggested Lucifer to Ratoff's accusing mind?

Lucifer. A fallen glory. A beauty turned evil.

He saw in his mind a picture of the Searle who walked round the farm with him; his hatless blond hair blown into untidy ends by the wind, his hands pushed deep into very English flannels. Lucifer. He nearly laughed aloud.

But there was, of course, a strangeness in Searle's good looks. A-what was it? — an unplaceable quality. Something not quite of the world of men

Perhaps that was what had suggested fallen angels to Serge's fertile mind.

Anyhow, Searle seemed a good chap, and they were going to do a book together; and Searle knew that he was engaged to marry Liz, so that he would not —

He did not finish the thought, even to himself. Nor did it occur to him to wonder how a beauty that made one think of fallen angels was likely to affect a young woman engaged to a B.B.C. commentator.

He drove home at a better speed than normally, put away the car, took Liz's favourite sweets out of their place in the glove compartment, and went in to present them and be kissed for his forethought. He was also the bearer of the good news that Cormac Ross liked the idea of the book and was prepared to pay them well for it. He could hardly wait to reach the drawing-room.

The baronial hall was very silent and cold as he crossed it, and it smelled, in spite of anachronistic baize doors, of sprouts and stewed rhubarb. In the drawing-room, which as usual was warm and gay, there was no one but Lavinia, who was sitting with her feet on the fender and her lap covered with that day's issue of the highbrow weeklies.

'It's a strange thing, said Lavinia, taking her nose out of the Watchman, 'how immoral it is to make money out of writing.

'Hullo, Aunt Vin. Where are the others?

'This rag used to worship Silas Weekley until he went and made himself a fortune. Em is upstairs, I think. The others aren't back yet.

'Back? Back from where?

'I don't know. They went out in that dreadful little car of Bill Maddox's after lunch.

'After lunch.

"The slick repetition of a technique as lacking in subtlety as a poster." Don't they make you sick! Yes, I didn't need Liz this afternoon, so they went out. It has been a glorious day, hasn't it?

'But it is only ten minutes till dinner time!

'Yes. Looks as though they're going to be late, said Lavinia, her eyes pursuing the slaughter of Silas.

So Liz hadn't heard the broadcast! He had been talking to her and she hadn't even been listening. He was dumbfounded. The fact that the old lady in Leeds, and the child in the hospital in Bridgwater, and the lighthouse-keeper in Scotland hadn't been listening either made no difference. Liz *always* listened. It was her business to listen. He was Walter, her fiance, and if he spoke to the world it was right that she should listen. And now she had gone out gaily with Leslie Searle and left him talking into thin air. She had gone out gadding without a thought, on a Friday, on his broadcast afternoon, gone out God knew where, with Searle, with a fellow she had known only seven days, and they stayed out to the very last minute. She wasn't even there to have chocolates given her when he had gone out of his way to get them for her. It was monstrous.

Then the vicar arrived. No one had remembered that he was coming to dinner. He was that kind of man. And Walter had to spend another fifteen minutes with earthworms when he had already had more than enough of them. The vicar had listened to his broadcast and was enchanted by it; he could talk of nothing else.

Mrs Garrowby came in, greeted the vicar with commendable presence of mind, and went away to arrange for a supplement of tinned peas to the entree and a pastry covering for the stewed rhubarb.

By the time that the missing pair were twenty minutes late and Mrs Garrowby had decided not to wait for them, Walter had changed his attitude and decided that Liz was dead. She would never be late for dinner. She was lying dead in a ditch somewhere. Perhaps with the car on top of her. Searle was an American and it was well-known that all Americans were reckless drivers and had no patience with English lanes. They had probably gone round a corner slap into something.

He played with his soup, his heart black with dread, and listened to the vicar on demonology. He had heard at one time or another everything that the vicar had to say on the subject of demonology, but at least it was a relief to get away from worms.

Just when his heart had blackened and shrunk to the state of a very old mushroom, the gay voices of Searle and Liz could be heard in the hall. They came in breathless and radiant. Full of off-hand apology for their lateness and commendation for the family in that they had not kept dinner back for them. Liz presented Searle to the vicar but did not think of casting any special word to Walter before falling on her soup like a starving refugee. They had been all over the place, they said; first they had viewed Twells Abbey, and adjacent villages; then they had met Peter Massie and had gone to look at his horses and given him a lift into Crome; then they had had tea at the Star and Garter in Crome, and they had been on the way home out of Crome when they found a cinema which was showing *The Great Train Robbery*, and it was of course not in anyone's power to refuse a chance of viewing *The Great Train Robbery*. They had had to sit through several modern exhibits before *The Great Train Robbery* appeared-which was what had made them late-but it had been worth waiting for.

An account of *The Great Train Robbery* occupied most of the fish course.

'How was the broadcast, Walter? Liz said, reaching for some bread.

It was bad enough that she did not say: 'I am desolated to have missed your broadcast, Walter'; but that she should spare for the broadcast only the part of her mind that was not occupied with the replenishing of her bread plate was the last straw.

'The vicar will tell you, said Walter. *He* listened.

The vicar told them, *con amore*. Neither Liz nor Leslie Searle, Walter noticed, really listened. Once, during the recital, Liz met Searle's glance as she passed him something and gave him her quick friendly smile. They were very pleased with themselves, with

each other, and with the day they had had.

'What did Ross say about the book? Searle asked, when the vicar had at last run down.

'He was delighted with the idea, Walter said, wishing passionately that he had never begun this partnership with Searle.

'Have you heard what they plan, Vicar? Mrs Garrowby said. 'They are going to write a book about the Rushmere. From its source to the sea. Walter is going to write it and Mr Searle to illustrate it.

The vicar approved of the idea and pointed out its classic form. Was it to be on shanks's mare or with a donkey, he asked.

'On foot down to Otley, or thereabouts, Walter said. 'And by water from there.

'By water? But the Rushmere is full of snags in its early reaches, the vicar said.

They told him about the canoes. The vicar thought canoes a sensible craft for a river like the Rushmere, but wondered where they could be got.

'I talked to Cormac Ross about that today, Walter said, 'and he suggested that Kilner's, the small craft builders at Mere Harbour, might have some. They build for all over the world. It was Joe Kilner who designed that collapsible raft-boat-tent that Mansell took up the Orinoco on his last trip, and then said afterwards that if he had thought in time he could have made it a glider too. I was going to suggest that Searle and I should go over to Mere Harbour tomorrow and see Kilner-if he has no other plans.

'Fine, Searle said. 'Fine.

Then the vicar asked Searle if he fished. Searle did not, but the vicar did. The vicar's other interest, a short head behind demonology, was the dry fly. So for the rest of dinner they listened to the vicar on flies, with the detached interest that they might bring to cement-mixing, or gum-chewing, or turning the heel of a sock; a subject of academic interest only. And each of them used the unoccupied half of their minds in their own fashion.

Walter decided that he would leave the little white packet of chocolates on the hall table, where he had dropped it as he went in to dinner, until Liz asked about it; when he would tell her casually what it was. She would be full of compunction, he decided, that he had thought of her while she had entirely forgotten him.

As they walked out of the dining-room he glanced sideways to make sure that the little packet was still there. It certainly was. But Liz, too, it seemed, had dropped something on the table on her way in to dinner. A great flat box of candy from the most expensive confectioners in Crome. Four pounds weight at the very least. 'Confits, it said in dull gold freehand across its cream surface, and it was tied up with yards of broad ribbon finished in a most extravagant bow. Walter considered the 'confits' affected and the ribbon deplorably ostentatious. The whole thing was in the worst of taste. So like an American to buy something large and showy. It made him quite sick to look at it.

What made him sick, of course, was not the box of candy.

He was sick of an emotion that was old before candy was invented.

As he poured brandy for Searle, the vicar and himself to drink with their coffee he looked round in his mind for comfort, and found it.

Searle might give her boxes of expensive sweetmeats, but it was he, Walter, who knew what her favourite sweets were.

Or-did Searle know that too? Perhaps the Crome confectioner didn't happen to have dragees.

He tilted the brandy bottle again. He needed an extra spot tonight.

If Emma Garrowby could ever be said to be glad of any connection of Leslie Searle with Trimmings, she was glad of the plan for the book. It would take him away from the household for the rest of his stay in Orfordshire; and once the Rushmere trip was over he would go away and they would see no more of him. No harm had been done so far, that she could see. Liz liked being with the creature, of course, because they were both young and because they seemed to laugh at the same things and because, naturally, he was attractive to look at. But she showed no signs of being seriously attracted. She never looked at Searle unless she had something to say to him; never followed him with her eyes as girls in love did, never sat near him in a room.

For all her apprehensiveness, Emma Garrowby was an imperceptive woman.

It was the semi-detached Lavinia, oddly enough, who observed and was troubled. The trouble welled up and overflowed into words, almost against her will, some seven days later. She was dictating as usual to Liz, but was making heavy weather of it. This was so rare that Liz was puzzled. Lavinia wrote her books with great ease, being genuinely interested in the fate of her current heroine. She might not remember afterwards whether it was Daphne or Valerie who had met her lover when she was gathering violets in the dawn on Capri, but while Daphne (or Valerie) had been in the process of that meeting and that gathering Lavinia Fitch watched over her like a godmother. Now, contrary to all precedent, she was distrait and had great difficulty in remembering even what Sylvia looked like.

'Where was I, Liz, where was I? she said, striding up and down the room; a pencil stuck through the bird's-nest mop of sandy hair and another being chewed to pulp between her sharp little teeth.

'Sylvia is coming in from the garden. Through the French window.

'Oh, yes. "Sylvia paused in the window, her slim form outlined against the light, her large blue eyes wary and doubtful — "

'Brown, said Liz.

'What?

'Her eyes. Liz flipped back some pages of the script. 'Page 59. "Her brown eyes, limpid as rainpools lying on autumn leaves — "

'All right, all right. "-her large brown eyes wary and doubtful. With a graceful movement of resolution she stepped into the room, her tiny heels tapping lightly on the parquet floor — "

'No heels.

'What d'you say?

'No heels.

'Why not?

'She has just been playing tennis.

'She could have changed, couldn't she? Lavinia said with a touch of asperity that was foreign to her.

'I don't think so, Liz said patiently. 'She is still carrying her racket. She came along the terrace "swinging her racket lightly".

'Oh. *Did* she! Lavinia said explosively. 'I bet she can't even *play*! Where was I? "She stepped into the room-she stepped into the room, her white frock fluttering"-no; no, wait-"she stepped into the room"-Oh, *damn* Sylvia! she burst out, flinging her chewed pencil on to the desk. 'Who cares what the silly moron does! Let her stay in the blasted window and starve!

'What is the matter, Aunt Vin?

'I can't concentrate.

'Are you worried about something?

'No. Yes. No. At least, yes, I suppose I am, in a way.

Can I help?

Lavinia ran her fingers through the bird's-nest, found the pencil there, and looked gratified. 'Why, *there's* my yellow pencil. She put it back again in her hair-do. 'Liz, dear, don't think me interfering or anything, will you, but you're not by any chance getting a little-a little *smitten* with Leslie Searle, are you?

Liz thought how like her aunt it was to use an out-of-date Edwardianism like 'smitten'. She was always having to modernise Lavinia's slang for her.

'If by «smitten» you mean in love with him, be comforted. I'm not.

'I don't know that that's what I do mean. You don't love a magnet, if it comes to that.

'A what! What are you talking about?

'It isn't a falling in love, so much. It's an attraction. He fascinates you, doesn't he. She made it a statement, not a question.

Liz looked up at the troubled childish eyes, and hedged. 'Why should you think that? she asked.

'I suppose because I feel it too, Lavinia said.

This was so unexpected that Liz had no words.

'I wish now I had never asked him down to Trimmings, Lavinia said miserably. 'I know it isn't his fault-it isn't anything he *does*-but there's no denying that he is an upsetting person. There's Serge and Toby Tullis not on speaking terms —

'That is nothing new!

'No, but they had become friends again, and Serge was behaving quite well and working, and now-

'You can hardly blame Leslie Searle for that. It would have happened inevitably. You know it would.

'And it was very odd the way Marta took him back with her after dinner the other night and kept him till all hours. I mean the way she *appropriated* him as her escort, without waiting to see what the others were doing.

'But the vicar was there to see Miss Easton-Dixon home. Marta knew that. It was natural that he should go with Miss Dixon; they live in the same direction.

'It wasn't what she did, it was the way she did it. She-she grabbed.

'Oh, that is just Marta's lordly way.

'Nonsense. She felt it too. The-the fascination.

'Of course, he is exceedingly attractive, Liz said; and thought how utterly the cliche failed to convey any quality of Leslie Searle's.

'He is-uncanny, Lavinia said, unhappily. 'There is no other word. You wait and watch for the next thing he is going to do, as if it were-as if it were a sign, or a portent, or a revelation, or something. She used the 'you' impersonally, but caught Liz's eye and said challengingly: 'Well, you *do* don't you!

'Yes, Liz said. 'Yes, I suppose it is like that. As if-as if the smallest thing he does had significance.

Lavinia picked up the chewed pencil from the desk and doodled with it on the blotter. Liz noticed that she was making figures-of-eight. Lavinia must be very troubled indeed. When she was happy she made herring-bones.

'It's very odd, you know, Lavinia said, mulling it over in her mind. 'I get the same «kick» out of being in a room with him that I would get out of being in a room with a famous criminal. Only nicer, of course. But the same feeling of-of wrongness. She made several furious figures-of-eight. 'If he were to disappear tonight, and someone told me that he was just a beautiful demon and not a human being at all, I would believe them. So help me, I would.

Presently she flung the pencil back on to the desk, and said with a little laugh: 'And yet it's all so absurd. You look at him and try to find out what is so extraordinary about him, and what is there? Nothing. Nothing that can't be matched elsewhere, is there? That radiant fairness and that skin like a baby; that Norwegian correspondent of the *Clarion* that Walter used to bring down had those. He is extraordinarily graceful for a man; but so is Serge Ratoff. He has a nice gentle voice and an engaging drawl; but so have half the inhabitants of Texas and a large part of the population of Ireland. You catalogue his attractions and what do they add up to? I can tell you what they *don't* add up to. They don't add up to Leslie Searle.

'No, said Liz soberly. 'No. They don't.

'The-the *exciting* thing is left out. *What* is it that makes him different? Even Emma feels it, you know.

'Mother?

'Only it takes her the opposite way. She hates it. She quite often disapproves of the people I bring down, sometimes she even dislikes them. But she *loathes* Leslie Searle.

'Has she told you so?

'No. She didn't have to.

No, thought Liz. She did not have to. Lavinia Fitch-dear, kind, abstracted Lavinia-manufacturer of fiction for the permanently adolescent, had after all a writer's intuition.

'I wondered for a while if it was that he was a little mad, Lavinia said.

'Mad!

'Only nor-nor-west, of course. There is an unholy attraction about people who are stark crazy in one direction but quite sane every other way.

'Only if you know about their craziness, Liz pointed out. 'You would have to know about their mental kink before you suffered any unholy attraction.

Lavinia considered that. 'Yes, I suppose you are right. But it doesn't matter, because I decided for myself that the «mad» theory didn't work. I have never met anyone saner than Leslie Searle. Have you?

Liz hadn't.

'You don't think, do you, Lavinia said, taking to doodling again and avoiding her niece's eye, 'that Walter is beginning to resent Leslie?

'Walter, Liz said, startled. 'No, of course not. They are the greatest friends.

Lavinia, having with seven neat strokes erected a house, put the door in it.

'Why should you think that about Walter? Liz said, challenging.

Lavinia added four windows and a chimney-stack, and considered the effect.

'Because he is so considerate to him.

'Considerate! But Walter is always -

'When Walter likes people he takes them for granted, Lavinia said, making smoke. 'The more he likes them the more he takes them for granted. He even takes you for granted-as you have no doubt observed before now. Until lately he took Leslie Searle for granted. He doesn't any more.

Liz considered this in silence.

'If he didn't like him, she said at length, 'he wouldn't be doing the Rushmere with him, or the book. Well, would he? she added, as Lavinia seemed wholly absorbed in the correct placing of a doorknob.

'The book is going to be very profitable, Lavinia said, with only a hint of dryness.

'Walter would never collaborate with someone he didn't like, Liz said stoutly.

'And Walter might find it difficult to explain why he didn't want to do the book after all, Lavinia said as if she had not spoken.

'Why are you telling me this? Liz said, half angry.

Lavinia stopped doodling and said disarmingly: 'Liz darling, I don't quite know, except perhaps that I was hoping you would find some way of reassuring Walter. In your own clever way. Which is to say, without dotting any I's or crossing any T's. She caught Liz's glance, and said: 'Oh, yes, you are clever. A great deal cleverer than Walter will ever be. He is not very clever, poor Walter. The best thing that ever happened to him was that you should love him. She pushed the defaced blotter away from her and smiled suddenly, 'I don't think, you know, that it is entirely a Bad Thing that he should have a rival to contend with. As long as there is no chance of the contention becoming serious.

'Of course it isn't serious, Liz said.

'Then suppose we get that moron out of the window, and finish the chapter before lunch, Lavinia said, and, picking up the pencil,

began to chew on it again.

But a sense of shock stayed with Liz while she recorded, for the ultimate benefit of the lending libraries and the Inland Revenue, the doings of Sylvia the moron. It had not occurred to her that her awareness of Searle could be known to anyone but herself. Now it seemed that not only did Lavinia know very accurately how she felt about him, but she hinted that Walter too might know. But that surely was impossible. How could he know? Lavinia knew because, as she so frankly said, she too was a victim of the Searle charm. But Walter would have no such pointer to her emotions.

And yet Lavinia had been so right. Walter's first easy taking-for-granted attitude to the visitor *had* changed to a host and guest relationship. It had changed imperceptibly and yet almost overnight. When and why had it changed? There was the unfortunate coinciding of the two so-different boxes of sweets; but that could hardly have rankled in any adult mind. The buying of candy for a girl was an automatic reflex with Americans; of no more significance than letting her go first through a doorway. Walter could hardly have resented that. How then could Walter have guessed the secret that was shared only by her fellow sufferer, Lavinia?

Her mind went on to consider Lavinia and her perceptions. She considered the one count that Lavinia had left out of the indictment-the snubbing of Toby Tullis-and wondered whether Lavinia had not mentioned it because she did not know, or whether she was merely indifferent to any suffering that Toby might be subjected to. Toby, as the whole village knew, was enduring the finest tortures of frustration since Tantalus. Searle had refused, with the most unimaginably kind indifference, to go to see Hoo House, or to take part in any of the other activities that Toby was eager to arrange for him. He had even failed to show any interest when Toby offered to take him over to Stanworth and present him. This had never happened to Toby before. His freedom to trot in and out of the ducal splendours of Stanworth was his trump card. He had never before played it in vain. With Americans especially it took the trick. But not with this American. Searle wanted no part of Toby Tullis, and made it clear with the most charming good manners. He stonewalled with a grace that for all its mordant quality was delightful to watch. Intellectual Salcott watched it with open delight.

And it was that that excoriated Toby.

To be snubbed by Leslie Searle was bad enough; to have it known that he was snubbed was torture.

Truly, thought Liz, the advent of Leslie Searle had not been a particularly fortunate happening for Salcott St Mary. Of all the people whose lives he touched, only Miss Easton-Dixon, perhaps, was wholly glad of his coming. He had been lovely with Miss Dixon; as kind and patient with her endless questions as though he had been a woman himself and interested in the small talk of the film world. He had trotted out for her benefit all the light gossip of studio politics, and had exchanged with her reminiscences of films good and films bad until Lavinia had said that they were like a couple of housewives swapping recipes.

That was the night that Marta had come to dinner; and there had been a moment during that evening, when Liz, watching him with Miss Dixon, was seized with a terrible fear that she might after all be falling in love with Leslie Searle. She was still grateful to Marta for reassuring her. For it was when Marta commandeered him and carried him off with her into the night, and she felt no slightest pang at seeing them go, that she knew that, however strongly she felt Searle's attraction, she was in no bondage to him.

Now, recording the doings of Sylvia the moron, she decided that she would take Lavinia's advice and find some way of reassuring Walter, so that he went away on this trip happy and with no grudge against Searle in his heart. When they came back from Mere Harbour, where they were taking possession of the two canoes and arranging for their transport to Otley to await them there, she would think up some small exclusive thing to do with Walter; something that would be tete-a-tete. It had been too often a triangle lately.

Or too often, perhaps, the wrong tete-a-tete.

Walter had welcomed the idea of progression by canoe, not because he looked forward to folding himself into an inadequate small boat, but, because it would give him his 'story'. If the book was to be a success he must have 'adventures', and an unusual method of locomotion was the easiest way of providing them. It is difficult to garner quaint experience when being borne along comfortably in a car. And walking has lost face since it became universal in the form of an activity called hiking. Walter, who had walked over a great part of Europe with a toothbrush and a spare shirt in his burberry pocket, would have been glad to do the Rushmere valley on foot, but felt that he could not hope to satisfy any modern devotee. His toothbrush-and-spare-shirt technique would merely puzzle the masochistic enthusiasts who plodded, packed and hobnailed, to the horizon their glazed eye was fixed on, more Atlas than Odysseus. And to do the valley as an incidental accompaniment to puppets or a Punch and Judy might be productive of copy but was a little infra dig in one whose holding in the Open Air was of almost proprietorial dimensions.

So Walter welcomed the idea of a canoe. And in the last week or so he had begun to welcome the idea for a different reason altogether.

In a car or on foot he would be cheek by jowl with Leslie Searle day after day; in a canoe he would be virtually free of him. Walter had reached the stage when the very sound of Searle's quiet drawl annoyed him into the need for momentary self-control. And a dim awareness that he was being a little ridiculous did nothing to soothe his annoyance. The last straw had been when Liz started being kind to him. He had never analysed Liz's attitude to him, which had always seemed an appropriate one. That is to say that Liz supplied the undemanding devotion that he considered ideal in a woman after eight months of Marguerite Merriam. And now Liz had gone kind on him. 'Condescending' was his private word for it. But for his new awareness of Liz he might not have noticed the change, but Liz had moved to the very forefront of his thoughts and he analysed her lightest word, her most fleeting expression. And so he caught her being kind to him. Kind! To him. To Walter Whitmore.

Nothing so revolutionary or so unbecoming could have happened but for the presence of Leslie Searle. Walter needed a great deal of self-control when he thought of Leslie Searle.

They had planned to camp out each night, weather permitting; and of this too Walter was glad. Not only would it give him opportunities for tangling the Great Bear in the branches of some oak, or describing the night life of field and stream, but it would excuse him from the close quarters of night in some tiny inn. You can stroll away by yourself from a bivouac, but not, without remark, from a pub.

The canoes were dubbed Pip and Emma-the Rushmere, according to Searle, being a place where it was always afternoon-and Mrs Garrowby was unreasonably annoyed to find that Searle owned the Emma one. But what dismayed her far more was a dawning realisation that she might not, after all, be getting rid of Searle. There was to be one piece of comparative cheating about the trip, it seemed. To photograph the larger pieces of landscape needed more apparatus than could conveniently be carried in a canoe that was already occupied by a sleeping-bag and groundsheet, so Searle was to come back later and photograph the set-pieces at his leisure.

But for all the subterranean tremors that agitated Trimmings-Lavinia's misgiving, Walter's resentment, Liz's feeling of guilt, Emma's hatred-life on the surface was smooth. The sun shone with the incongruous brilliance so common in England before the last trees are in leaf; the nights were windless and warm as summer. Indeed Searle, standing on the stone terrace after dinner one night, had pointed out that This England might very well be That France.

'Reminds you of Villefranche on a summer night, he said. 'Until now that has been my measuring rod for magic. The lights on the water, and the warm air smelling of geranium, and the last boat out to the ship between one and two in the morning.

'What ship? someone had asked.

'Any ship, Searle said lazily. 'I had no idea that Perfidious Albion had the magic too.

'Magic! Lavinia had said. 'Why, we're the original firm.

And they laughed a little and were all friendly together.

And nothing disturbed that friendliness up to the moment when Walter and Searle departed together into the English landscape late on a Friday night. Walter had given his usual talk, had come home for dinner (always put back an hour and a half on 'talks' day) and they had all drunk to the success of *Canoes on the Rushmere*. Then Liz drove them through the sweet spring evening, up the valley of the Rushmere, to their starting-point twenty miles away. They were going to spend the night in Grim's House; a cave that overlooked the high pastures where the river originated. Walter said that it was apt and fitting that they should begin their tale in prehistoric England, but Searle doubted if the domestic arrangements were likely to be any more prehistoric than some he had already sampled. A lot of England, he said, didn't seem to have come far from Grim, whoever he was.

However, he was all for sleeping in a cave. He had slept, in his time, on the floor of a truck, on the open desert, in a bath, on a billiard table, in a hammock, and inside the cabin of a Giant Wheel at a fair, but so far he had not sampled a cave. He was all for the

Liz took them to where the track ended, and walked up the hundred yards of grassy path with them to inspect their shelter for the night. They were all very gay, full of good food and good drink and a little drunk with the magic of the night. They dumped their food and sleeping bags, and walked Liz back to the car. When they stopped talking for a moment the quiet pressed against their ears, so that they stayed their steps to listen for some sound.

'I wish I wasn't going home to a roof, Liz said into the silence. 'It's a night for the prehistoric.

But she went away down the rutted track to the road, her headlights making metallic green stains on the dark grass, and left them to the silence and the prehistoric.

After that the two explorers became mere voices on the telephone.

Each evening they rang up Trimmings from some pub or call-box to report progress. They had walked successfully down to Otley and found their canoes waiting for them. They took to the river and were delighted with their craft. Walter's first notebook was already full, and Searle was lyrical on the beauty of this England in its first light powdering of blossom. From Capel he called specially for Lavinia to tell her that she had been right about the magic; England did really have the original blue-print.

'They sound very happy, Lavinia said in a half-doubtful, half-relieved way as she hung up. She longed to go and see them, but the compact was that they were to be as strangers in a strange land, passing down the river and through Salcott St Mary as though they had never seen it before.

'You spoil my perspective if you bring Trimmings into it, Walter had said. 'I must see it as if I had never seen it before; the countryside, I mean; see it fresh and new.

So Trimmings waited each night for their telephoned report; mildly amused at this make-believe gulf.

And then on Wednesday evening, five days after they had set out, they walked into the Swan and were hailed as the Stanleys of the Rushmere and treated to drinks by all and sundry. They were tied up at Pett's Hatch, they said, and were sleeping there; but they had not been able to resist walking across the fields to Salcott. By water it was two miles down river from Pett's Hatch to Salcott, but thanks to the loop of the Rushmere it was only a mile over the fields from one to the other. There was no inn at Pett's Hatch, so they had walked by the field-path to Salcott and the familiar haven of the Swan.

Talk was general at first as each newcomer inquired as to how they did. But presently Walter took his beer to his favourite table in the corner, and after a little Searle followed him. Several times from then on one or other of the loungers at the bar made a movement towards the two to engage them once more in conversation, only to pause and change his mind as something in the attitude of the two men to each other struck him as odd. They were not quarrelling; it was just that something personal and urgent in their intercourse kept the others, almost unconsciously, from joining them.

And then, quite suddenly, Walter was gone.

He went without noise and without a goodnight. Only the bang of the door called their attention to his exit. It was an eloquent slam, furious and final; a very pointed exit.

They looked in a puzzled fashion from the door to the unfinished beer at Walter's empty place, and decided in spite of that angry sound that Walter was coming back. Searle was sitting at his ease, relaxed against the wall, smiling faintly; and Bill Maddox, encouraged by the easing of that secret tension that had hung like a cloud in the corner, moved over and joined him. They talked outboard-motors and debated clinker versus carvel until their mugs were empty. As Maddox got up to refill them he caught sight of the flat liquid in Walter's mug and said: 'I'd better get another for Mr Whitmore; that stuff's stale.

'Oh, Walter has gone to bed, Searle said.

'But it's only — Maddox was beginning, and realised that he was about to be tactless.

'Yes, I know; but he thought it would be safer.

'Is he sickening for something?

'No, but if he stayed any longer he was liable to throttle me, Searle said amiably. 'And at the school Walter went to they take a poor view of throttling. He is putting temptation behind him. Literally.

'You been annoying poor Mr Whitmore? said Bill, who felt that he knew this young American much better than he knew Walter Whitmore.

'Horribly, Searle said lightly, matching a smile with Bill's.

Maddox clicked his tongue and went away to get the beer.

After that, conversation became general. Searle stayed until closing time, said goodnight to Reeve, the landlord, as he locked the door behind them, and walked down the village street with the others. At the narrow lane that led between the houses to the fields he turned off, pelted by their mock-condolences on his lack of a snug bed, and throwing back in his turn accusations of frowst and ageing arteries.

'Goodnight! he called, from far down the lane.

And that was the last that anyone in Salcott St Mary ever saw of Leslie Searle.

Forty-eight hours later Alan Grant stepped back into the affairs of the Trimmings household.

Grant had just come back from Hampshire, where a case had ended unhappily in suicide, and his mind was still reviewing the thing, wondering how he might have managed things differently to a different end; so that he listened with only an ear-and-a-half to what his superior was saying to him until a familiar name caught his whole attention.

'Salcott St Mary! said Grant.

'Why? said Bryce, stopping his account. 'Do you know the place?

'I've never been there, but I know of it, of course.

'Why of course?

'It's a sort of artistic thieves'-kitchen. There's been a migration of intelligentsia to the place. Silas Weekley lives there, and Marta Hallard, and Lavinia Fitch. Tullis has a house there too. It isn't Toby Tullis who is missing, by any chance? he asked hopefully.

'No, unfortunately. It's a chap called Searle. Leslie Searle. A young American, it seems.

For a moment Grant was back in the crowded doorway of Cormac Ross's room, listening to a voice saying: 'I've forgotten my megaphone. So the beautiful young man had disappeared.

'Orfordshire say they want to put it in our laps not because they think the problem is insoluble but because it's a kid-glove affair. They think it would be easier for us than for them to pursue inquiries among the local bigwigs, and if there is any arresting to be done they would rather that we did it.

'Arresting? Are they suggesting that it was murder?

'They have a strong leaning to that theory, I understand. But, as the local inspector said to me, it sounds so absurd when you say it aloud that they shrink from uttering the name, even.

'What name?

'Walter Whitmore.

'*Walter Whitmore!* Grant let out his breath in a soundless whistle. 'I don't wonder they don't like saying it aloud. Walter Whitmore! What is he supposed to have done to Searle?

'They don't know. All they've got is some suggestion of a quarrel before the disappearance. It seems that Walter Whitmore and Searle were travelling down the Rushmere in canoes, and —

'Canoes?

'Yes, a kind of stunt. Whitmore was going to write about it and this chap Searle was going to supply the illustrations.

'Is he an artist, then?

'No. A photographer. They camped out each night, and on Wednesday night they were sleeping on the river bank about a mile from Salcott. They both came to the pub at Salcott for a drink that evening. Whitmore left early-in some sort of pet, it is alleged. Searle stayed till closing-time and was seen to start off down the track to the river. After that he was not seen by anyone.

'Who reported the disappearance?

'Whitmore did next morning. When he woke and found that Searle had not occupied his sleeping-bag.

'He didn't see Searle at all on Wednesday night after leaving the pub?

'No, he says he fell asleep, and though he woke in the night he took it for granted that Searle had come back and was sleeping; it was too dark to see anything. It was only when daylight came that he realised that Searle had not been to bed.

'The theory is that he fell into the river, I suppose.

'Yes. The Wickham people took charge and dragged for a body. But it's a bad, muddy stream, there, between Capel and Salcott St Mary, the Wickham people say, so they weren't unbearably surprised not to find one.

'I don't wonder they don't want to touch the business, Grant said dryly.

'No. It's a delicate affair. No real suggestion of anything but accident. And yet-one big question mark.

'But-but *Walter Whitmore*! Grant said. 'There *is* something inherently absurd about it, you know. What would that lover of little bunnies have to do with murder?

'You've been in the Force long enough to know that it is just those lovers of little bunnies that commit murder, his chief said snappily. 'Anyhow, it is going to be your business to sift this artistic thieves'-kitchen of yours through a fine-mesh riddle until you're left with something that won't go through the mesh. You had better take a car. Wickham say it is four miles from a station, with a change at Crome anyhow.

'Very good. Do you mind if I take Sergeant Williams with me?

'As chauffeur, or what?

'No, Grant said amiably. 'Just so that he knows the lay-out. Then if you pull me off this for something more urgent-as you will at any moment-Williams can carry on.

'You do think up the most convincing excuses for snoozing in a car. $\,$

Grant took this, rightly, as capitulation, and went away to collect Williams. He liked Williams and liked working with him. Williams was his opposite and his complement. He was large and pink and slow-moving, and he rarely read anything but an evening paper; but he had terrier qualities that were invaluable in a hunt. No terrier at a rat hole ever displayed more patience or more pertinacity than Williams did when introduced to a quarry. 'I would hate to have you on my tail, Grant had said to him more than once in their years of working together.

To Williams, on the other hand, Grant was everything that was brilliant and spontaneous. He admired Grant with passion, and envied him without malice; Williams had no ambition, and coveted no man's shoes. 'You've no idea how lucky you are, sir, Williams

would say, 'not looking like a policeman. Me, I go into a pub, and they take one look at me and think: Copper! But with you, they just cast an eye over you and think: Army in plain clothes; and they don't think another thing about you. It's a great advantage in a job like ours, sir.

'But you have advantages that I lack, Williams, Grant had once pointed out.

'As what, for instance? Williams had said, unbelieving.

'You have only to say: "Hop it!" and people just dissolve. When I say "Hop it!" to anyone, they are as likely as not to say: "Who do you think you're talking to?"

'Lord love you, sir, Williams had said. 'You don't even have to say: "Hop it!" You just look at them, and they begin to recollect appointments.

Grant had laughed and said: 'I must try that sometime! But he enjoyed Williams's mild hero-worship; and still more he enjoyed his reliability and his persistence.

'Do you listen to Walter Whitmore, Williams? he asked, as Williams drove him down the unswerving road that the Legions had first surveyed two thousand years ago.

'Can't say I do, sir. I'm not one for the country, much. Being born and brought up in it is a drawback.

'A drawback?

'Yes. You know just how workaday it really is.

'More Silas Weekley than Walter Whitmore.

'I don't know about the Silas bloke, but it certainly isn't like anything Walter Whitmore makes of it. He thought of it for a little. 'He's a dresser-upper, he said. 'Look at this Rushmere trip.

'I'm looking.

'I mean, there wasn't anything to prevent him staying at home with his aunt and doing the river valley like a Christian, in a car. The Rushmere isn't all that long. But no, he has to frill it up with a canoe and things.

Mention of Walter's aunt prompted Grant to another question.

'I suppose you don't read Lavinia Fitch?

'No, but Nora does.

Nora was Mrs Williams, and the mother of Angela and Leonard.

'Does she like them?

'Loves them. She says three things make her feel cosy in advance. A hot-water bottle, a quarter-pound of chocolates, and a new Lavinia Fitch.

'If Miss Fitch did not exist, it seems, it would be necessary to invent her, Grant said.

'Must make a fortune, said Williams. 'Is Whitmore her heir?

'Her presumptive heir, at any rate. But it isn't Lavinia who has disappeared.

'No. What could Whitmore have against this Searle chap?

'Perhaps he just objects to fauns on principle.

'To what, sir?

'I saw Searle once.

'You did!

'I spoke to him in passing at a party about a month ago.

'What was he like, sir?

'A very good-looking young man indeed.

'Oh, Williams said, in a thoughtful way.

'No, said Grant.

'No?

'American, Grant said irrelevantly. And then, remembering that party, added: 'He seemed to be interested in Liz Garrowby, now that I remember.

'Who is Liz Garrowby?

'Walter Whitmore's fiancee.

'He was? Well!

'But don't go making five of it until we get some evidence. I can't believe that Walter Whitmore ever had enough red blood in him to conk anyone on the head and push them into a river.

'No, Williams said, considering it. 'Come to think of it, he's more of a push-ee.

Which put Grant in a good mood for the rest of the journey.

At Wickham they were welcomed by the local inspector, Rodgers; a thin, anxious individual who looked as though he slept badly. He was alert, however, and informative and full of forethought. He had even booked two rooms at the Swan in Salcott and two at the White Hart in Wickham, so that Grant could have his choice. He bore them off to lunch at the White Hart, where Grant confirmed the room-booking and caused the Salcott booking to be cancelled. There was to be no suggestion yet that Scotland Yard were interested in the matter of Leslie Searle's disappearance; and it was not possible to conduct inquiries from the Swan without creating a sensation in Salcott

'I'd like to see Whitmore, though, Grant said. 'I suppose he is back at-what do you call it: Miss Fitch's place.

'Trimmings. But he's up in town today giving his broadcast.

'In London? said Grant, a little surprised.

'It was arranged like that before they set out on this trip. Mr Whitmore's contract calls for a month off in August, when broadcasting has its «off» season; so there was no question, it seems, of passing up this week's broadcast just because he was canoeing on the Rushmere. They had arranged to be in Wickham today and to spend the night there. They had booked two rooms at the Angel. It's the

olde-worlde show-place in Wickham. Very photogenic. Then this happened. But since there was nothing Mr Whitmore could do here, he went up to do his half-hour, just as he would have if they had reached Wickham.

'I see. And he is coming back tonight?

'If he doesn't vanish into thin air.

'About this vanishing: did Whitmore agree that there had been disagreement between them?

'I didn't put it to him. That's what — The Inspector broke off.

'That's what I'm here for, Grant said, finishing the sentence for him.

'That's about it, sir.

'Where did the «disagreement» story come from?

'The Swan. Everyone who was there on Wednesday night had the impression that there was some kind of tension between them.

'No overt quarrel?

'No, nothing like that. If there had been anything like that I could have taxed him with it. All that happened was that Mr Whitmore left early without saying goodnight, and Searle said he was angry about something.

'Searle said! To whom?

'To the local garage-keeper. A chap called Maddox. Bill Maddox.

'Have you talked to Maddox?

'I talked to them all. I was in the Swan last night. We spent the day dragging the river in case he had fallen in, and making inquiries all round the neighbourhood in case he had lost his memory and was just wandering. We couldn't find any body, and no one had seen him or anyone answering his description. So I finished up at the Swan, and saw most of the people who had been there on Wednesday night. It's the only pub in the place, and a very nice respectable little house run by a Joey; an ex-sergeant of Marines; and it's the meeting-place for the whole village. None of them was exactly anxious to involve Mr Whitmore —

'Popular, is he?

'Well, popular enough. He probably shines by comparison. There's a very odd crew lives here, I don't know if you know.

'Yes, I've heard.

'So they didn't want to get Walter Whitmore into trouble, but they had to explain why the two friends didn't go back to their camp together. And once they broke down and talked they were unanimous that there was some sort of trouble between them.

'Did this Maddox volunteer his story?

'No, the local butcher did. Maddox had told them about it on the way home on Wednesday. After they had seen Searle go away by himself down the lane. Maddox confirmed it, though.

'Well, I'll go and see Whitmore when he comes back tonight, and ask for his story. Meanwhile we'll go and see the place where they camped on Wednesday night.

'I don't want to appear in Salcott just vet, Grant said as they drove out of Wickham. 'Is there some other way to the river bank?

'There's no way at all to the river bank, properly speaking. There's about a mile of field-path from Salcott to where they were. But we could reach the place just as easily from the main Wickham-Crome road, across the fields. Or we could turn off the road by a lane that goes to Pett's Hatch, and walk down the river bank from there. They were moored about a quarter mile below Pett's Hatch.

'On the whole, I'd rather walk across the fields from the main road. It would be interesting to see how much of a walk it is. What kind of a village is Pett's Hatch?

'It isn't a village at all. Just a ruined mill and the few cottages that used to house the workers there. That is why Whitmore and Searle walked into Salcott for their evening drink.

'I see.

The ever-efficient Rodgers pulled a one-inch Survey map out of the pocket of his car, and studied it. The field opposite which they had stopped looked to Grant's urban eye exactly like any other field that they had passed since leaving Wickham, but the Inspector said: 'It should be about opposite here, I think. Yes; there's where they were; and here is us.

He showed the lay-out to Grant. North and south ran the road from Wickham south to Crome. West of it lay the Rushmere, out of sight in its valley, running north-east to meet the road at Wickham. At a point level with where they were now halted, the river ran back on itself in a wide loop over the flat bed of the valley. At the point where it first curved back, Whitmore and Searle had made their camp. On the farther side of the valley, where the river came back level with them, was Salcott St Mary. Both their camp and the village of Salcott were on the right bank of the river, so that only a short mile of alluvial land lay between their camp and the village.

As the three men reached the third field from the road, the countryside opened below them, so that the relevant section of the Rushmere valley was laid out for them as it had been on Rodgers's map: the flat green floor with the darker green scarf of the Rushmere looped across it, the huddle of roofs and gardens on the far side where Salcott St Mary stood in its trees; the lonely cluster, back up the river to the south, that was Pett's Hatch.

'Where is the railway from here? Grant asked.

'There is no railway nearer than Wickham. No station, that is. The line runs the other side of the Wickham-Crome road; not in the valley at all.

'Plenty of buses on the Wickham-Crome road?

'Oh, yes. But you're not suggesting that the fellow just ducked, are you?

I'm keeping the possibility in mind. After all, we know nothing about him. I'll admit there are more likely possibilities.

Rodgers led them down the long slope to the river bank. Where the river turned away south-west two large trees broke the line of pollarded willows: a tall willow and an ash. Under the ash were moored two canoes. The grass still had a trampled look.

'This is the place, Rodgers said. 'Mr Whitmore spread his sleeping-bag under that big willow, and Searle put his round the other side of the ash where there is a hollow between the roots that makes a natural shelter. So that it was quite natural that Mr Whitmore should not know that he wasn't there.

Grant moved over to where Searle's bed had been, and considered the water.

'How much current is there? If he had tripped over those roots in the dark and taken a header into the river, what would happen?

'It's a horrid stream, the Rushmere, I admit. All pot-holes and under-tows. And a bottom of what the Chief Constable calls "immemorial mud". But Searle could swim. Or so Walter Whitmore says.

'Was he sober?

'Cold, stone sober.

'Then if he went into the water unconscious, where would you expect to find his body?

'Between here and Salcott. Depends on the amount of rain. We've had so little lately that you'd normally find the river low, but they had a cloudburst at Tunstall on Tuesday-out of the blue in the good old English fashion-and the Rushmere came down like a mill-race.

'I see. What became of the camp stuff?

'Walter Whitmore had it taken up to Trimmings.

'I take it that Searle's normal belongings are still at Trimmings.

'I expect so

'Perhaps I had better take a look through them tonight. If there was anything interesting to us among them it will have gone by now, but they may be suggestive. Had Searle been on good terms with the other inhabitants of Salcott, do you know?

'Well, I hear there was a scene about a fortnight ago. A dancer chap flung a mug of beer over him.

'Why? asked Grant, identifying the 'dancer chap' without difficulty. Marta was a faithful recorder of Salcott history.

'He didn't like the attentions that Toby Tullis was paying to Searle, so they say.

'Did Searle?

'No, if all reports are true, Rodgers said, his anxious face relaxing to a moment's amusement.

'So Tullis wouldn't love him very much either?

'Perhaps not

'You haven't had time, I suppose, to get round to alibis.

'No. It wasn't until early evening that we found it might be more than a simple case of missing. Up till then it was a simple matter of drag and search. When we found what was turning up we wanted outside help and sent for you.

'I'm glad you sent so soon. It's a great help to be there when the tapes go up. Well, I don't think there is anything else we can do

here. We had better get back to Wickham, and I'll take over.

Rodgers dropped them at the White Hart, and left them with assurances of any help that was within his power.

'Good man, that, Grant said, as they climbed the stairs to inspect their rooms under the roof-rooms with texts in wools and flowered wall-paper-'he ought to be at the Yard.

'It's a queer set-up, isn't it? Williams said, firmly taking the pokier of the two rooms. 'The rope trick in an English meadow. What do you think happened to him, sir?

'I don't know about "rope trick", but it does smell strongly of sleight-of-hand. Now you see it, now you don't. The old conjurer's trick of the distracted attention. Ever seen a lady sawn in half, Williams?

'Many's the time.

'There's a strong aroma of sawn lady about this. Or don't you smell it?

'I haven't got your nose, sir. All I see is a very queer set-up. A spring night in England, and a young American goes missing in the mile between the village and the river. You really think he *might* have ducked, sir?

'I can't think of any adequate reason why he should, but perhaps Whitmore can.

'I expect he will be very anxious to, Williams said dryly.

But oddly enough Walter Whitmore showed no anxiety to put forward any such theory. On the contrary, he scorned it. It was absurd, he said, manifestly absurd, to suggest that Searle should have left of his own accord. Quite apart from the fact that he was very happy, he had a very profitable deal to look forward to. He had been enormously enthusiastic about the book they were doing together, and it was fantastic to suggest that he would just walk out like that.

Grant had come to Trimmings after dinner, tactfully allowing for the fact that dinner at Trimmings must be very late on broadcast day. He had sent in word to ask if Mr Whitmore would see Alan Grant, and had not mentioned his business until he was face to face with Walter.

His first thought on seeing Walter Whitmore in the flesh was how much older he looked than he had expected; and then wondered whether it was that Walter looked much older than he had done on Wednesday. He looked disorientated, Grant thought; adrift. Something had happened to him that did not belong to the world he knew and recognised.

But he took Grant's announcement of his identity calmly.

'I was almost expecting you, he said, offering cigarettes. 'Not you personally, of course. Just a representative of what has come to be known as the Higher Levels.

Grant had asked about their trip down the Rushmere, so as to set him talking; if you got a man to talk enough he lost his defensive quality. Whitmore was drawing too hard on his cigarette but talking quite freely. Before he had actually reached their Wednesday evening visit to the Swan, Grant deflected him. It was too early yet to ask him about that night.

'You don't really know much about Searle, do you, he pointed out. 'Had you heard of him at all before he turned up at that party of Ross's?

'No, I hadn't. But that isn't strange. Photographers are two a penny. Almost as common as journalists. There was no reason why I should have heard of him.

'You have no reason to believe that he may not be what he represented himself to be?

'No, certainly not. I may never have heard of him, but Miss Easton-Dixon certainly had.

'Miss Easton-Dixon?

'One of our local authors. She writes fairy-tales, and is a film addict. Not only did she know about Searle but she has a photograph.

'A photograph? Grant said, startled and pleased.

'In one of those film magazines. I haven't seen it myself. She talked about it one night when she came to dinner.

'And she met Searle when she came to dinner? And identified him?

'She did. They had a wonderful get-together. Searle had photographed some of her pet actors, and she had reproductions of them too.

'So there is no doubt in your mind that Searle is what he says he is.

'I notice you use the present tense, Inspector. That cheers me. But he sounded more ironic than cheered.

'Have you yourself any theory as to what could have happened, Mr Whitmore?

'Short of fiery chariots or witches' broomsticks, no. It is the most baffling thing.

Grant caught himself thinking that Walter Whitmore, too, was moved to think of sleight-of-hand.

'The most reasonable explanation, I suppose, Walter went on, 'is that he lost his way in the dark and fell into the river at some other spot, where no one would hear him.

'And why don't you approve of that theory? Grant asked, answering the tone that Whitmore used.

'Well, for one thing, Searle had eyes like a cat. I had slept out with him for four nights, and I know. He was wonderful in the dark. Secondly he had an extra-good bump of locality. Thirdly he was by all accounts cold sober when he left the Swan. Fourthly it is a beeline from Salcott to the river-bank where we were camped, by the hedges all the way. You can't stray, because if you walk away from the hedge you walk into plough or crop of some kind. And lastly, though this is hearsay evidence, Searle could swim very well indeed.

'There is a suggestion, Mr Whitmore, that you and Searle were on bad terms on Wednesday evening. Is there any truth in that?

'I thought we should get to that sooner or later, Walter said. He pressed the half-smoked cigarette into the ashtray until it was a misshapen wreck.

'Well? Grant prompted, as he seemed to have nothing more to say.

We had what might be called a-a «spat», I suppose. I was-annoyed. Nothing more than that.

'He annoyed you so much that you left him at the pub and walked back by yourself.

'I like being by myself.

'And you went to sleep without waiting for his return.

'Yes. I didn't want to talk to him any more that night. He annoyed me, I tell you. I thought that I might be in a better humour and he

in a less provocative mood in the morning.

'He was provocative?

'I think that is the word.

'About what?

'I don't have to tell you that.

'You don't have to tell me anything, Mr Whitmore.

'No, I know I don't. But I want to be as helpful as I can. God knows I want this thing cleared up as soon as possible. It is just that what we-disagreed about is something personal and irrelevant. It has no bearing whatever on anything that happened to Searle on Wednesday night. I certainly didn't lie in wait for him on the way home, or push him into the river, or subject him to violence.

'Do you know of anyone who would be likely to want to?

Whitmore hesitated; presumably with Serge Ratoff in his mind.

'Not that kind of violence, he said at length.

'Not what kind?

'Not that waiting-in-the-dark kind.

'I see. Just the ordinary sock-in-the-jaw kind. There was a scene with Serge Ratoff, I understand.

'Anyone who gets through life in close proximity to Serge Ratoff and doesn't have a scene with him must be abnormal, Walter said.

'You don't know of anyone who might have a grudge against Searle?

'No one in Salcott. I don't know anything of his friends or enemies elsewhere.

'Have you any objection to my looking through Searle's belongings?

'I haven't, but Searle might. What do you expect to find, Inspector?

'Nothing specific. A man's belongings are very revealing, I find. I am merely looking for suggestion of some sort; help of any kind in a very puzzling situation.

'I'll take you up now, then-unless there is anything else you want to ask me.

'No, thank you. You have been very helpful. I wish you could have trusted me far enough to tell me what the quarrel was about —

'There was no quarrel! Whitmore said sharply.

'I beg your pardon. I mean, in what way Searle riled you. It would tell me even more about Searle than it would about you; but perhaps it is too much to expect you to see that.

Whitmore stood by the door, considering this. 'No, he said slowly. 'No, I do see what you mean. But to tell you involves — No, I don't think I can tell you.

'I see you can't. Let us go up.

As they emerged into the baronial hall from the library where the interview had taken place, Liz had just come out of the drawing-room and was crossing to the stairs. When she saw Grant she paused and her face lighted with joy.

'Oh! she said, 'you've come with news of him!

When Grant said no, that he had no news, she looked puzzled.

'But it was you who introduced him, she insisted. 'At that party.

This was news to Walter and Grant could feel his surprise. He could also feel his resentment at that flash of overwhelming joy on Liz's face.

'This, Liz dear, he said in a cool, faintly malicious tone, 'is Detective Inspector Grant from Scotland Yard.

'From the Yard! But-you were at that party!

'It is not unheard of for policemen to be interested in the arts, Grant said, amused. 'But —

'Oh, please! I didn't mean it that way.

'I had only looked in at the party to pick up a friend. Searle was standing by the door looking lost because he didn't know Miss Fitch by sight. So I took him over and introduced them. That is all.

'And now you've come down here to-to investigate-

'To investigate his disappearance. Have you any theories, Miss Garrowby?

'I? No. Not even a rudimentary one. It just doesn't make sense. It's *fantastically* senseless.

'If it isn't too late may I talk to you for a little when I have been through Searle's belongings?

'No, of course it isn't too late. It isn't ten o'clock yet. She sounded weary. 'Since this happened time stretches out and out. It's like having-hashish, is it? Are you looking for anything in particular, Inspector?

'Yes, Grant said. 'Inspiration. But I doubt if I shall find it.

'I shall be in the library when you come down. I hope you will find something that will help. It is very dreadful being suspended from a spider's thread this way.

As he went through Searle's belongings Grant thought about Liz Garrowby-Marta's 'dear nice Liz'-and her relations with William's 'push-ee'. There was never any saying what a woman saw in any man, and Whitmore was of course a celebrity as well as a potentially good husband. He had said as much to Marta, coming away from the party that day. But how right had Marta been about Searle's power to upset? How much had Liz Garrowby felt Searle's charm? How much of that eager welcome of hers in the hall had been joy at Searle's imagined safety and how much mere relief from the burden of suspicion and gloom?

His hands turned over Searle's things with automatic efficiency, but his mind was busy deciding how much or how little to ask Liz Garrowby when he went downstairs again.

Searle had occupied a first-floor room in the battlemented tower that stuck out to the left of the Tudor front door, so that it had windows on three sides of it. It was large and high, and was furnished in very superior Tottenham Court Road, a little too gay and coy for its Victorian amplitude. It was an impersonal room and Searle had evidently done nothing to stamp it with his personality. This struck Grant as odd. He had rarely seen a room, occupied for so long, so devoid of atmosphere. There were brushes on the table, and books by the bedside, but of their owner there was no trace. It might have been a room in a shop window.

Of course it had been swept and tidied since last it was occupied six days ago. But still. But still.

The feeling was so strong that Grant paused to look round and consider. He thought of all the rooms he had searched in his time. They had all-even the hotel rooms-been redolent of their late occupier. But here was nothing but emptiness. An impersonal blank. Searle had kept his personality to himself.

Grant noticed, as Liz had noticed on that first day, how expensive his clothes and luggage were. As he turned over the handkerchiefs in the top drawer he noticed that they had no laundry mark, and wondered a little. Done at home, perhaps. The shirts and linen were marked but the mark was old and probably American.

As well as the two leather suitcases, there was a japanned tin case like a very large paint-box, with the name 'L. Searle' in white letters on the lid. It was fitted with a lock but was unfastened and Grant lifted the lid with some curiosity, only to find that it was filled with Searle's photographic material. It was built on the lines of a paint-box, with a top tray that was made to lift out. Grant hooked out the top tray with his forefingers and surveyed the deeper compartment below it. The lower compartment was full except for an oblong of empty space where something had been taken out. Grant put down the tray he was holding and went to unroll the camp outfit that had been brought back from the riverbank. He wanted to know what fitted into that oblong space.

But there was nothing that fitted.

There were two small cameras in the pack and some rolls of film. Neither separately nor together did they fit into the space in the tin box. Nor did anything else in the pack.

Grant came back and stood for some time considering that empty space. Something roughly 10 inches by 3–1/2 by 4 had been taken out. And it had been taken out when the box was in its present position. Any heaving about of the box would have dislodged the other objects from their packed position and obliterated the empty space.

He would have to ask about that when he went downstairs.

Meanwhile, having given the room a quick going-over, he now went over it in detail. Even so, he nearly missed the vital thing. He had run through the rather untidy handkerchief-and-ties drawer and was in the act of closing it, when something among the ties caught his attention and he picked it out.

It was a woman's glove. A very small woman's glove.

A glove about Liz Garrowby's size.

Grant looked for its mate but there was none. It was the usual lover's trophy.

So the beautiful young man had been sufficiently attracted to steal one of his beloved's gloves. Grant found it oddly endearing. An almost Victorian gesture. Nowadays fetish-worship took much more sinister forms.

Well, whatever the glove proved, it surely proved that Searle had meant to come back. One does not leave stolen love-objects in one's tie-drawer to be exposed to the unsympathetic gaze of the stranger.

The question to be decided was: whose glove, and how much or how little did it mean?

Grant put it in his pocket and went downstairs. Liz was waiting for him in the library as she had promised, but he noticed that she had had company. No one person could have smoked so many cigarettes as the ends in the ash-tray indicated. Grant deduced that Walter Whitmore had been in consultation with her over this affair of police interrogation.

But Liz had not forgotten that she was also a secretary and official receptionist for Trimmings, and she had caused drinks to be brought. Grant refused them because he was on duty, but approved of her effort on his behalf.

'I suppose this is only a beginning, Liz said, indicating the *Wickham Times* (once weekly every Friday) which was lying open on the table. *Young Man Missing*, said a modest headline in an inconspicuous position. And Walter was referred to as Mr Walter Whitmore, of Trimmings, Salcott St Mary, the well-known commentator.

'Yes, Grant said. 'The daily Press will have it tomorrow.

Whitmore's Companion Drowned, they would say tomorrow, on the front page. *Whitmore Mystery. Friend of Whitmore Disappears.*

'It is going to be very bad for Walter.

'Yes. Publicity is suffering from a sort of inflation. Its power is out of all proportion to its worth.

'What do you think happened to him, Inspector? To Leslie?

'Well, for a time I had a theory that he might have disappeared of his own accord.

'Voluntarily! But why?

'That I wouldn't know without knowing more about Leslie Searle. You don't think, for instance, that he was the type to play a practical joke?

'Oh, *no*. Quite definitely not. He wasn't that kind at all. He was very quiet and-and had excellent taste. He wouldn't see anything funny in practical joking. Besides, where could he disappear to with all his belongings left behind? He would have only what he stood up in.

'About those belongings. Did you ever happen to see inside the japanned tin box that belongs to him?

'The photographic box. I think I must have once. Because I remember thinking how neatly packed everything was.

'Something has been taken out of the lower compartment, and I can't find anything that fits the space. Would you be able to tell what is missing, do you think?

'I'm sure I shouldn't. I don't remember anything in detail. Only the neatness. It was chemical stuff, and slides, and things like that.

'Did he keep it locked?

'It did lock, I know. Some of the stuff was poisonous. But I don't think it was kept permanently locked. Is it locked now?

'No. Otherwise I shouldn't have known about the empty space.

'I thought policemen could open anything.

'They can, but they may not.

She smiled a little and said: 'I was always in trouble with that at school.

'By the way, he said, 'do you recognise this glove? And produced it from his pocket.

'Yes, she said, mildly interested. 'It looks like one of mine. Where did you find it?

'In Searle's handkerchief drawer.

It was exactly like touching a snail, he thought. The instant closing-up and withdrawal. One moment she was frank and unselfconscious. The next moment she was startled and defensive.

'How odd, she said, through a tight throat. 'He must have picked it up and meant to give it back to me. I keep a spare pair in the pocket of the car, a respectable pair, and drive in old ones. Perhaps one of my respectable pair dropped out one day.

'I see.

'That one, certainly, is one of the kind I keep in the car pocket. Presentable enough to go calling or shopping with but not too grand for everyday wear.

'Do you mind if I keep it for a little?

'No, of course not. Is it an "exhibit"? It was a gallant effort to sound light.

'Not exactly. But anything that was in Searle's room is of potential value at the moment.

'I think that glove is more likely to mislead you than help you, Inspector. But keep it by all means.

He liked the touch of spirit, and was glad of her quick recovery. He had never enjoyed teasing snails.

'Would Mr Whitmore be able to tell what is missing from that case?

'I doubt it, but we can see. She made for the door to summon Walter.

'Or anyone else in the household?

'Well, Aunt Lavinia wouldn't. She never knows even what is in her own drawers. And Mother wouldn't, because she never goes near the tower room except to put her head in to see that the bed had been done and the place dusted. But we can ask the staff.

Grant took them up to the tower bedroom and showed them what he meant about the empty space. What had lain in that oblong gap?

'Some chemical that he has already used up? Walter suggested.

'I thought of that, but all the necessary chemicals are still there and hardly used at all. You can't think of anything that you have seen him with that would fill that gap?

They could not; and neither could Alice the housemaid.

No one did Mr Searle's room but her, she said. A Mrs Clamp came from the village every day to help, but she did not do bedrooms. Just stairs and corridors and offices and that.

Grant watched their faces and speculated. Whitmore was poker-faced; Liz half interested by the puzzle, half troubled; Alice apprehensive that she might be held responsible for whatever was missing from the case.

He was getting nowhere.

Whitmore came to the front door with him, and peering into the dark said: 'Where is your car?

'I left it down the avenue, Grant said, 'Goodnight, and thank you for being so helpful.

He moved away into the darkness and waited while Walter closed the door. Then he walked round the house to the garage. It was still open, and it held three cars. He tried the pockets of all three, but none of them held an odd glove. None of them held any gloves whatever.

Williams was sitting in the corner of the coffee-room at the White Hart, consuming a late supper; and the landlord greeted Grant and went away to bring supper for him too. Williams, with the aid of the local police, had spent a long, tiring, and unproductive afternoon and evening on Grant's theory that Searle might have, for reasons of his own, disappeared. At ten o'clock, having interviewed his twenty-third bus conductor, and the last available railway porter, he had called it a day, and was now relaxed over beer and sausage-and-mashed.

'Not a thing, he said, in answer to Grant's question. 'No one even remotely like him. Any luck with you, sir?

'Nothing that makes the situation any clearer.

'No letters among his belongings?

'Not one. They must be all in his wallet, if he has any at all. Nothing but packets of photographs.

'Photographs? Williams's ears pricked.

'Local ones that he has taken since he came here.

'Oh. Any of Walter Whitmore's girl, by any chance?

'A very great number indeed.

'Yes? Posed ones?

'No, Williams, no. Romantic. Her head against a sunlit sky with a spray of almond blossom across it. That kind of thing.

'Is she photogenic, would you say? A blonde?

'No, she is a small, dark, plainish creature with a nice face.

'Oh. What does he want to go on photographing her for? Must be in love with her.

'I wonder, Grant said; and was silent while food was put in front of him.

'You really ought, just for once, to try those pickles, sir, Williams said. 'They're wonderful.

'For the five hundred and seventh time, I do not eat pickles. I have a palate, Williams. A precious possession. And I have no intention of prostituting it to pickles. There was something among Searle's things that was a great deal more suggestive than any photograph.

'What, sir?

'One of the girl's gloves, Grant said; and told him where it had been found.

'Well, well, Williams said, and chewed the information over in silence for a little. 'Doesn't sound as if it had gone very far.

'What?

'The affair. If he was still at the stage of stealing her glove. Honestly, sir, in this day and age I didn't imagine that anyone was driven to making do with a glove.

Grant laughed. 'I told you. She is a nice girl. Tell me, Williams, what kind of object would fit a space 10 inches by 3–1/2 by 4?

'A bar of soap, said Williams without hesitation.

'Unlikely. What else?

'Box of cigarettes?

'No. Not a smoker.

'Food of some kind? Processed cheese is that shape.

'No

'Revolver? Revolver in a case, I mean.

'I wonder. Why should he have a revolver?

'What space are you trying to fill, sir? Williams asked, and Grant described the photographic box, and the gap in the neatly fitted compartment.

'Whatever had been there was something solid, so that the outline was hard and clear. Nothing that was still available among his belongings fitted the gap. So either he took it out and got rid of it, or it was removed for some reason after he had disappeared.

'That would mean that someone at Trimmings is suppressing evidence. You still think Whitmore not the type, sir?

'Type?

'Not the bumping-off type.

'I think Whitmore would be more liable to get into a pet than to see red.

'But he wouldn't need to see red to drown Searle. A shove when he was in a pet would have done it, and he mightn't have been able to do anything about rescue in the dark. Then he might lose his head and pretend he knew nothing about it. Heaven knows that happens often enough.

'You think Whitmore did it but did it in half-accident?

 $^{\prime}\text{I}$ don't know who did it. But it's my firm conviction that Searle is still in the river, sir.

'But Inspector Rodgers says he dragged it thoroughly.

'The sergeant in charge at Wickham Police Station says the mud in the bed of the Rushmere goes half-way to Australia.

'Yes. I know. The Chief Constable, I understand, made the same observation in a less vivid phrase.

'After all, Williams said not listening, 'what *could* have become of him if he didn't drown? If all reports are true he wasn't a type you look at and never remember.

No. That was true. Grant thought of the young man who had stood in Cormac Ross's doorway, and reflected how little the official description of the missing man conveyed the individual they were looking for.

A man, in his early twenties, five feet eight-and-a-half or nine inches, slim build, very fair, grey eyes, straight nose, cheek bones rather high, wide mouth; hatless; wearing belted mackintosh over grey tweed jacket, grey pullover, blue sports shirt, and grey flannels, brown American shoes with instep buckle instead of lacing; low voice with American accent.

No one reading that description would visualise the actuality that was Leslie Searle. On the other hand, as Williams pointed out, no one could set eyes on the actual Searle and not look back for a second glance. No one would see him and not remember.

'Besides, what could he want to disappear *for*? persisted Williams.

'That I can't guess without knowing much more of his background. I must get the Yard on to it first thing tomorrow. There's a female cousin somewhere in England, but it is his American background that I want to know about. I can't help feeling that the bumping-off trade is more native to California than it is to the B.B.C.

'No one from California took whatever it was from Searle's case, Williams pointed out.

'No, Grant said, contemplative; and went over the inhabitants of Trimmings in his mind. Tomorrow he would have to begin the collection of alibis. Williams was of course right. It was unlikely to the point of fantasy that Searle should have disappeared in such a manner of his own accord. He had suggested to Liz Garrowby that Searle might have planned a practical joke for Walter's discomfiture, and Liz had scorned the suggestion. But even if Liz had been wrong in her estimate, how could Searle have done it?

'There is still your passing motorist, he said aloud.

'What's that, sir?

'We have interviewed the people on the regular transport services, but we have had no way yet of reaching the casual motorist who might have given him a lift.

Williams, dilated with sausage and beer, smiled benevolently on him. 'You make the Fifty-seventh look like a girl's school, sir.

'The Fifty-seventh?

'You die awfully hard. You still in love with that theory about his ducking of his own accord?

'I still think that he could have walked on from the river bend, up across the fields, to the main Wickham-Crome road and got a lift there. I'll ask Bryce in the morning if we could have a radio S.O.S. about it.

'And after he got the lift, sir? What then? All his luggage is at Trimmings.

'We don't know that. We don't know anything about him before he walked into that party of Ross's. He is a photographer; that is all we know for certain. He says he has only a female cousin in England but he may have half a dozen homes and a dozen wives for all we know

'Maybe, but why not go in a natural fashion when this trip was finished? After all, he would want to collect on that book they were doing, surely? Why all the mumbo-jumbo?

'To make things awkward for Walter, perhaps.

'Yes? You think that? Why?

'Perhaps because I wouldn't mind making things awkward for Walter myself, Grant said with a half smile. 'Perhaps after all it is just wishful-thinking on my part.

'It certainly is going to be very uncomfortable for Whitmore, Williams said, without any noticeable regret.

'Very. Shouldn't wonder if it leads to civil war.

'War?

'The Faithful Whitmorites versus the Doubters.

'Is he taking it hard?

'I don't think he quite realises yet what has hit him. He won't, I think, until he sees the daily Press tomorrow morning.

'Haven't the Press been at him already?

'They haven't had time. The *Clarion* arrived on the doorstep at five this afternoon, I understand, and went away to get information at the Swan when he failed to get it at Trimmings.

'Trust the Clarion to be first. Whitmore would have done better to see whoever it was. Why didn't he?

'Waiting for his lawyer to arrive from town, so he said.

'Who was it, do you know? The Clarion.

'Jammy Hopkins.

'Jammy! I'd as soon have a flame-thrower on my tail as Jammy Hopkins. He has no conscience whatever. He'll make up a story out of whole cloth if he doesn't get an interview. You know, I begin to be sorry for Walter Whitmore. He couldn't really have given a thought to Jammy, or he wouldn't have been so quick to shove Searle into the river.

'And who is being Die-Hard now? Grant said.

In the morning Grant telephoned to his chief, but he had no sooner begun his story than Bryce interrupted him.

'That you, Grant? You send back that Man Friday of yours straight away. Benny Skoll cleaned out Poppy Plumtre's bedroom safe last night.

'I thought all Poppy's valuables were with Uncle.

'Not since she got herself a new daddy.

'Are you sure that it's Benny?

'Quite sure. It has all his trade-marks. The telephone call to get the hall porter out of the way, the lack of fingerprints, the breadand-jam and milk meal, the exit by the service entrance. Short of signing his name in the visitors' book, he couldn't have written his signature more clearly over it.

'Ah, well; the day criminals learn to vary their technique we go out of business.

'I need Williams to pick up Benny. Williams knows Benny like a book. So send him back. How are you doing?

'Not too well

'No? How?

'We have no corpse. So we have two possibilities: Searle is dead, either by accident or by design; or he has just disappeared for ends of his own.

'What sort of ends?

'Practical joke, perhaps.

'He had better not try that stuff with us.

'It might, of course, be plain amnesia.

'It had better be.

'There are two things I need, sir. A radio S.O.S. is one. And the other is some information from the San Francisco police about Searle. We are working in the dark, knowing nothing about him. His only relation in England is a cousin; a woman artist, with whom he had no contact. Or says he hadn't. She will probably get in touch with us when she sees the papers this morning. But she will probably know very little about him.

'And you think the San Francisco police will know more?

'Well, San Francisco was his headquarters, I understand, when he spent the winter months on the Coast, and they can no doubt dig up something about him there. Let us know whether he ever was in any bother and if anyone was liable to kill him for any reason.

'A lot of people would like to kill a photographer, I should think. Yes, we'll do that.

'Thank you, sir. And about the S.O.S.?

'The B.B.C. don't like their nice little radio cluttered up with police messages. What did you want to say?

'I want to ask anyone who gave a lift to a young man between Wickham and Crome on Wednesday night to get in touch with us.

'Yes, I'll see to that. I suppose you have covered all the regular services?

'Everything, sir. Not a sign of him anywhere. And he is hardly inconspicuous. Short of his having a rendezvous with a waiting plane-which only happens in boys' stories, as far as I'm aware-the only way he could have got away from the district is by walking over the fields and getting a lift on the main road.

'No evidence of homicide?

'None so far. But I shall see what alibis the locals have, this morning.

'You push Williams off before you do anything else. I'll send the San Francisco information to the Wickham Station when it comes through.

'Very good, sir. Thank you.

Grant hung up and went to tell Williams.

'Damn Benny, Williams said. 'Just when I was beginning to like this bit of country. It's no day to wrestle with Benny anyhow.

'Is he tough?

'Benny? No! He's a horror. He'll cry and carry on and say that we are hounding him, and that he is no sooner out of stir and trying to make good-"make good"! Benny! — than we are down on him to come and be questioned, and what chance has he in the circs, and so on. He turns my stomach. If Benny saw an honest day's work coming his way he'd run for his life. He's a wonderful cryer, though. He once got a question asked in Parliament. You'd wonder how some of those M.P.s ever had brains enough to ask for a railway ticket from their home towns. Have I got to take a *train* to town?

'I expect Rodgers will give you a car to Crome and you can get a fast train there, Grant said, smiling at the horror on his colleague's face at the thought of train travel. He himself went back to the telephone and called Marta Hallard at the Mill House in Salcott St Mary.

'Alan! she said. 'How nice. Where are you?

'At the White Hart in Wickham.

'You poor dear!

'Oh, it isn't too bad.

'Don't be so noble. You know it is primitive to the point of being penitential. Have you heard about our latest sensation, by the way?

'I have. That is why I am in Wickham.

There was a complete silence at that.

Then Marta said: 'You mean the Yard are interested in Leslie Searle's drowning?

'In Searle's disappearance, let us say.

'You mean, that there is some truth in this rumour of a quarrel with Walter?

'I'm afraid I can't discuss it over the telephone. What I wanted to ask you was whether you would be at home this evening if I came along.

'But you must come and stay, of course. You can't stay at that dreary place. I'll tell Mrs —

'Thank you with all my heart, but I can't do that. I must be here in Wickham at the centre of things. But if you like to give me dinner —

'Of course I shall give you dinner. You shall have a beautiful meal, my dear. With one of my omelets and one of Mrs Thrupp's chickens, and a bottle from the cellar that will take the taste of the White Hart beer out of your mouth.

So, a little heartened at the prospect of civilisation at the end of the day, Grant went out on his day's task, and he began with Trimmings. If there was to be a reckoning of alibis it was fitting that the inhabitants of Trimmings should be the first to give an account of themselves.

It was a fine blue morning, growing soft after an early frost, and no day, as Williams had pointed out, to waste on the Bennys of this life; but the sight of Trimmings standing up unblushingly in the bright sunlight restored Grant's wavering good humour. Last night it had been a lighted doorway in the dark. Today it stood revealed, extravagantly monstrous, in all its smug detail, and Grant was so enraptured that his foot came down on the brake and he brought the car to a standstill at the curve of the drive, and sat there gazing.

'I know just how you are feeling, a voice said at his elbow. And there was Liz; a little heavy-eyed, he noticed, but otherwise calm and friendly.

'Good morning, he said. 'I was a little dashed this morning because I couldn't drop everything and go fishing. But I feel better now.

'It is a beauty, isn't it, she agreed. 'You don't quite believe it is there at all. You feel that no one could possibly have thought it up; it just appeared.

Her thoughts shifted from the house to his presence, and he saw the question coming.

'I am sorry to be a nuisance, but I am busy this morning getting rid of the undergrowth in this case.

'Undergrowth?

'I want to get rid of all the people who can't possibly enter into the case at all.

'I see. You are collecting alibis.

'Yes. He opened the car door, so that she might ride the short distance to the house.

'Well, I hope we have good ones. I regret to say that I haven't one at all. It was the first thing I thought of when I knew who you were. It's very odd, isn't it, how guilty an innocent person feels when he can't account for himself on the umpteenth inst. Do you want everyone's alibi? Aunt Lavinia's and mother's and all?

'And those of the staff, too. Of everyone who had any connection with Leslie Searle.

'Well, you had better start with Aunt Vin. Before she begins her morning chore. She dictates for two hours every morning, and she likes to begin punctually.

'Where were you, Miss Garrowby? he asked as they arrived at the door.

'At the material time? He thought she was being deliberately cold-blooded about it; the 'material time' was when Leslie Searle had presumably lost his life, and he did not think that she was forgetting that fact.

'Yes. On Wednesday night.

'I had what they call in detective stories "retired to my room". And don't tell me that it was "early to retire", either. I know it was. I like going upstairs early. I like being alone at the end of the day.

'Do you read?

'Don't tell, Inspector, but I write.

'You too?

Do I disappoint you?

'You interest me. What do you write-or shouldn't I ask?

'I write innocuous heroines out of my system, that's all.

'Tilda the tweeny with the hare-lip and the homicidal tendencies, as antidote to Maureen.

She looked at him for a long moment and then said: 'You are a very odd sort of policeman.

'I suspect that it is your idea of policemen that is odd, Grant said briskly. 'Will you tell your aunt that I am here?

But there was no need to announce him. Miss Fitch was in the hall as Liz ran up the steps, and she said in tones more surprised than grieved:

'Liz, you are five minutes late! Then she saw the Inspector, and said: 'Well, well, they were right. They said that no one would ever take you for a policeman. Come in, Inspector. I have wanted so much to meet you. Officially, as it were. Our last encounter could hardly be termed a meeting, could it. Come into the morning-room. That is where I work.

Grant apologised for keeping her from her morning's dictation, but she professed herself glad to postpone for at least ten minutes her business with 'the tiresome girl'. Grant took the 'tiresome girl' to be the current Fitch heroine.

Miss Fitch, too, it seemed, had retired early on Wednesday night. At half-past nine, to be exact.

'When a family are in each other's pocket all day long, as we are, she said, 'they tend to go to their rooms early at night. She had watched a radio play, and had lain awake a little, half-listening for her sister coming in, but had fallen asleep quite early after all.

'Coming in? Grant said. 'Was Mrs Garrowby out, then?

'Yes. She was at a W.R.I. meeting.

He asked her about Searle, then. What she had thought of him, and what in her opinion he was liable to do or not to do. She was surprisingly guarded about Searle, he thought; as if she were picking her steps; and he wondered why.

When he said: 'Did Searle, in your opinion, show signs of being in love with your niece? she looked startled, and said 'No, of

course not! too quickly and too emphatically.

'He did not pay her attentions?

'My dear man, Miss Fitch said, any American pays a girl attentions. It is a conditioned reflex. As automatic as breathing.

'You think he was not seriously interested in her?

'I am sure that he wasn't.

'Your nephew told me last night that he and Searle had telephoned to you each night on their way down the river.

'Voc

'Did everyone in the household know about the message on Wednesday night? I mean, know where the two men were camped?

I expect so. The family certainly did; and the staff were always anxious to hear about their progress so I suppose everyone knew.

'Thank you very much, Miss Fitch. You have been very kind.

She called Liz in, and Liz took him to her mother and went back to the morning-room to record the doings of the latest Maureen.

Mrs Garrowby was another person without an alibi. She had been at the W.R.I. meeting at the village hall, had left there when the meeting broke up at half-past nine, had accompanied Miss Easton-Dixon part of the way home and had left her where their roads branched. She had come in about ten; or later, perhaps: she had strolled home because it was a lovely night; and had locked up the front of the house. The back door was always locked by Mrs Brett, the cook-housekeeper.

Emma Garrowby did not fool Grant for a moment. He had met her counterpart too often; that ruthless maternalism masquerading in a placid exterior. Had Searle got in the way of plans she had made for her daughter?

He asked her about Searle, and there was no step-picking at all. He had been a charming young man, she said. Quite exceptionally charming. They all liked him enormously, and were shattered by this tragedy.

Grant caught himself receiving this mentally with an expressive monosyllable.

He felt a little suffocated by Mrs Garrowby, and was glad when she went away to find Alice for him.

Alice had been walked-out on Wednesday night by the under-gardener, and had come in at a quarter past ten, whereupon the door had been locked behind her by Mrs Brett, and they had gone up together, after having a cup of cocoa, to their rooms in the back wing. Alice really was shattered by the fate that had overtaken Leslie Searle. Never, she said, had she had to do for a nicer young man. She had met dozens of young men, gentlemen *and* others, who considered a girl's ankles, but Mr Searle was the only one she had ever met who considered a girl's feet.

'Feet?

She had said as much to Mrs Brett, and to Edith, the parlourmaid. He would say: 'You can do this or that, and that will save you coming up again, won't it. And she could only conclude that this was an American characteristic, because no Englishman she had ever come across had ever cared two hoots whether you had to come up again or not.

Edith, too, it seemed, mourned for Leslie Searle; not because he considered her feet but because he was so good-looking. Edith proved to be very superior and refayned. Much too refayned to be walked out by an under-gardener. She had gone to her room to watch the same play that her mistress was watching. She heard Mrs Brett and Alice come up to bed, but the wing bedrooms were too far away to hear anyone come into the main block, so she did not know when Mrs Garrowby had come in.

Neither did Mrs Brett. After dinner, Mrs Brett said, the family did not worry the staff at all. Edith laid out the bed-time drinks, and after that the baize door in the hall was not normally opened again until the following morning. Mrs Brett had been nine years with Miss Fitch, and Miss Fitch could trust her to manage the staff and the staff premises.

When Grant went to the front door on his way to the car he found Walter Whitmore propped against the terrace wall. He bade Grant good morning and hoped that the alibis had been satisfactory.

It seemed to Grant that Walter Whitmore was visibly deteriorating. Even the few hours since last night had made a difference. He wondered how much a reading of this morning's papers had contributed to the slackening of Walter's facial structure.

'Have the Press been hounding you yet? he asked.

'They were here just after breakfast.

'Did you talk to them?

'I saw them, if that is what you mean. There wasn't much I could say. They'll get far more copy down at the Swan.

'Did your lawyer come?

'Yes. He's asleep.

'Asleep!

'He left London at half-past five, and saw me through the interview. He had to leave things in a hurry so he didn't get to bed last night till two this morning. If you take my meaning.

Grant left him with an illogical feeling of relief and went down to the Swan. He ran his car into the paved brick yard at the rear of it and knocked at the side door.

A bolt was drawn with noisy impatience, and Reeve's face appeared in the gap. 'It's not a bit of use, he said. 'You'll have to wait till opening time.

'As a policeman, I appreciate that snub at its true value, Grant said. 'But I'd like to come in and talk to you for a moment.

'You look more Service than Police, if you ask me, said the ex-Marine, amused, as he led the way into the bar parlour. 'You're the spit of a Major we had with us Up The Straights once. Vandaleur was his name. Ever come across him?

Grant had not come across Major Vandaleur.

'Well, what can I do for you, sir? It's about this Searle affair, I take it.

'Yes. You can do two things for me. I want your considered opinion-and I mean considered-on the relations between Whitmore and Searle on Wednesday evening. And I should like a list of all the people in the bar that night and the times they left.

Reeve had all a service man's objective attitude to a happening. He had no desire to dress it up, or to make it reflect his own personality as an artist did. Grant felt himself relaxing. It was almost like listening to the report of one of his own men. There was no obvious ill-feeling between the men, Reeve said. He would not have noticed them at all, if they had not been isolated by the fact that

no one moved away from the bar to join them. Normally, someone or other would have moved over to resume a conversation that had begun when they were at the bar together. But on Wednesday there was something in their unconsciousness of the rest that kept people from intruding.

'They were like two dogs walking round each other, Reeve said. 'No row, but a sort of atmosphere. The row might burst out any minute, if you see what I mean.

'Did you see Whitmore go?

'No one did. The boys were having an argument about who played cricket for Australia in what year. They paused when the door banged, that was all. Then Bill Maddox, seeing that Searle was alone, went over and talked to him. Maddox keeps the garage at the end of the village.

'Thanks. And now the list of those in the bar.

Grant wrote the list down; county names, most of them, unchanged since Domesday Book. As he went out to get his car he said: 'Have you any Press staying in the house?

'Three, Reeve said. 'The Clarion, the Morning News, and the Post. They're all out now, sucking the village dry.

'Also ran: Scotland Yard, Grant said wryly, and drove away to see Bill Maddox.

At the end of the village was a high clapboarded structure on which faded paint said: William Maddox and Son, Carpenters and Boatbuilders. At one corner of this building a bright black and yellow sign pointed into the yard at the side and said simply: Garage.

'You manage to make the best of both worlds, I see, he said to Bill Maddox when he had introduced himself, and tilted his head at the sign.

'Oh, Maddox and Son is Father, not me.

'I thought that perhaps you were "Son".

Bill looked amused. 'Oh, no; my *grandfather* was Son. That's my greatgrandfather's business. And still the best woodworkers this side of the county, though it's me that says it. You looking for information, Inspector?

Grant got all the information Maddox could give him, and as he was going away Maddox said: 'You happen to know a newspaperman called Hopkins, by any chance?

'Hopkins of the Clarion? We have met.

'He was round here for hours this morning, and do you know what that bloke actually believes? He believes that the whole thing is just a publicity stunt to sell that book they planned to write.

The combination of this typically Hopkins reaction and Bill's bewildered face was too much for Grant. He leant against the car and laughed.

'It's a debasing life, a journalist's, he said. 'And Jammy Hopkins is a born debase-ee, as a friend of mine would say.

'Oh, said Bill, still puzzled. 'Silly, I call it. Plain silly.

'Do you know where I can find Serge Ratoff, by the way?

'I don't suppose he's out of bed yet, but if he is you'll find him propping up the counter of the post-office. The post-office is in the shop. Half-way up the street. Serge lives in the lean-to place next door to it.

But Serge had not yet reached his daily stance by the post-office counter. He was coming down the street from the newsagent's with a paper under his arm. Grant had never seen him before, but he knew the occupational signs well enough to spot a dancer in a village street. The limp clothes covering an apparently weedy body, the general air of undernourishment, the wilting appearance that made one feel that the muscles must be flabby as tired elastic. It was a never-ceasing amazement to Grant that the flashing creatures who tossed ballerinas about with no more effort than a slight gritting of teeth, went out of the stage door looking like under-privileged barrow boys.

He brought the car to a halt at the pavement as he came level with Serge, and greeted him.

'Mr Ratoff?

'That is me.

'I'm Detective-Inspector Grant. May I speak to you for a moment?

'Everyone speaks to me, Serge said complacently. 'Why not you?

'It is about Leslie Searle.

'Ah, yes. He has become drowned. Delightful.

Grant offered some phrases on the virtue of discretion.

'Ah, discretion! said Serge, making five syllables of it. 'A bourgeois quality.

'I understand that you had a quarrel with Searle.

'Nothing of the sort.

'But -

'I fling a mug of beer in his face, that is all.

'And you don't call that a quarrel?

'Of *course* not. To quarrel is to be on a level, equal, how do you say, of the same rank. One does not quarrel with *canaille*. My grandfather in Russia would have taken a whip to him. This is England and decadent, and so I fling beer over him. It is a gesture, at least.

When Grant recounted this conversation to Marta, she said: 'I can't think what Serge would do without that grandfather in Russia. His father left Russia when he was three-Serge can't speak a word of Russian and he is half Neapolitan anyhow-but all his fantasies are built on that grandfather in Russia.

'You will understand, Grant said patiently, 'that it is necessary for the police to ask all those who knew Searle for an account of their movements on Wednesday night.

'Is it? How tiresome for you. It is a sad life, a policeman's. The movements. So limited, so rudimentary. Serge made himself into a semaphore, and worked his arms marionette-wise in a travesty of point-duty signals. 'Tiresome. Very tiresome. Lucid, of course, but

without subtlety.

'Where were you on Wednesday night from nine o'clock onwards? Grant said, deciding that an indirect approach was just a waste of time.

'I was dancing, Serge said.

'Oh. At the village hall?

Serge looked as if he were going to faint.

'You suggest that *I*, that *I*, *Serge Ratoff*, was taking part in a *op*?

'Then where were you dancing?

'By the river.

'What?

'I work out the choreography for a new ballet. I burst with ideas there by the river on a spring night. They rise up in me like fountains. There is so much atmosphere there that I get drunk on it. I can do anything. I work out a very charming idea to go with the river music of Mashako. It begins with a —

'What part of the river?

'What?

'What part of the river?

'How should I know? The atmosphere is the same over all.

'Well, did you go up river or down, from Salcott?

'Oh, up, most certainly.

'Why "most certainly"?

'I need the wide flat spaces to dance. Up river they are there. Down river from the village it is all steep banks and tiresome root crops. Roots. Clumsy, obscene things. They —

'Could you identify the place where you were dancing on Wednesday night?

'Identify?

'Point it out to me.

'How can I? I don't even remember where it was.

'Can you remember if you saw anyone while you were there?

'No one who was memorable?

'Memorable?

'I trip over lovers in the grass now and then, but they-how you say, go with the house. They are part of the-the set-up. Not memorable.

'Do you remember, then, what time you left the river bank on Wednesday night?

'Ah, yes, that I remember perfectly.

'When was it that you left?

'When the shooting star fell.

'What time was that?

'How should I know? I dislike shooting stars. They make butterflies in my stomach. Though I did think that it would be a very fine ending to my ballet to have a shooting star. A *Spectre de la Rose* leap, you know, that would set the town talking, and show them that I can still —

'Mr Ratoff, can you suggest how Leslie Searle came to be in the river?

'Came to be? He fell in, I suppose. Such a pity. Pollution. The river is so beautiful it should be kept for beautiful things. Ophelia. Shallott. Do you think Shallott would make a ballet? All the things she sees in the mirror? It is an idea, that, isn't it?

Grant gave up.

He left his car where it was and walked up the street to where the flat stone front of Hoo House broke the pinks and chromes and limes of the village's plastered gables. The house stood on the pavement like the other cottages, but three steps to the front door raised the ground floor of the house above street level. It withdrew itself a little, in a dignity entirely natural, from everyday affairs. As Grant pulled the Victorian bell in its bright brass circle he spared a thought to bless the man, whoever he was, who had been responsible for restoring the place. He had preserved the structure but had made no attempt to turn it back into its original form and so make a museum piece of it; the tale of the centuries was there, from the worn mounting-block to the brass bell. A great amount of money had obviously been spent to bring it to its present condition of worthiness, and Grant wondered if perhaps the saving of Hoo House was sufficient to justify Toby Tullis's existence.

The door was opened by a manservant who might have walked out of one of Toby's plays. He stood in the doorway, polite but impenetrable; a one-man road-block.

'Mr Tullis does not see anyone before lunch, he said in answer to Grant's inquiry. 'He works in the morning. The appointment with the Press is for two o'clock. He began to move his hand towards the door.

'Do I look like Press? Grant said tartly.

'Well-no, I can't say that you do-sir.

'Shouldn't you have a little tray? Grant said, suddenly silky.

The man turned submissively and took a silver card tray from the Jacobean chest in the hall.

Grant dropped a piece of pasteboard on to the tray and said: 'Present my compliments to Mr Tullis and say that I would be grateful for three minutes of his time.

'Certainly, sir, said the man, not allowing his eyes to stray even to the vicinity of the card. 'Will you be kind enough to step into the hall and wait.

He disappeared into a room at the rear of the house, and closed the door behind him on some very unworkmanlike sounds of

chatter. But he was back in a moment. Would Inspector Grant come this way, please. Mr Tullis would be very pleased to see him.

The room at the back, Grant found, looked into a large garden sloping down to the river-bank; it was another world altogether from the village street that he had just left. It was a sitting-room, furnished with the most perfect 'pieces' that Grant had ever seen out of a museum. Toby, in a remarkable dressing-gown, was sitting behind an array of silver coffee things; and behind him, in still more remarkable day clothes, hovered a callow and eager young man clutching a notebook. The notebook, from its virgin condition, appeared to be more a badge of office than the implement of a craft.

'You are modest, Inspector! Toby said, greeting him.

'Modest?

'Three minutes! Even the Press expect ten.

It had been meant as a compliment to Grant, but the effect was merely a reminder that Toby was the most-interviewed individual in the English-speaking world and that his time was priceless. As always, what Toby did was a little 'off-key'.

He presented the young man as Giles Verlaine, his secretary, and offered Grant coffee. Grant said that it was at once too late and too early for him, but would Mr Tullis go on with his breakfast; and Toby did.

'I am investigating the disappearance of Leslie Searle, Grant said. 'And that involves, I'm afraid, some disturbance of people who are only remotely connected with Searle. We have to ask everyone at Salcott who knew Searle to account for their time, as far as they can, on Wednesday night.

'Inspector, you offer me a felicity I had never hoped to enjoy. I have always been madly desirous of being asked what I was doing at nine-thirty p.m. on the night of Friday the 13th, but I never really dared to hope that it would happen to me.

'Now that it has happened, I hope your alibi is worthy of the occasion.

'It has the virtue of simplicity, at least. Giles and I spent the hours of that lovely midnight discussing Act II, Scene 1. Pedestrian, Inspector, but necessary. I am a business man.

Grant glanced from the business man to Giles, and decided that in his present stage of discipleship the young man would probably confess to the murder if it would pleasure Toby. A little thing like providing an alibi would be merely routine.

'And Mr Verlaine corroborates that, of course, Grant said.

'Yes, oh yes, of course; of course I do; yes, said Giles, squandering affirmatives in the service of his patron.

'It is a tragic thing indeed, this drowning, Toby said, sipping coffee. 'The sum total of the world's beauty is not so great that we can afford to waste any. A Shelleyan end, of course, and to that extent fitting. Do you know the Shelley Memorial at Oxford, Inspector?

Grant knew the Memorial and it reminded him of an overboiled chicken, but he refrained from saying so. Nor did Toby expect an answer.

'A lovely thing. Drowning is surely the ideal way of going out of this life.

'After a close acquaintance with a great variety of corpses taken from the water, I can't say that I agree with you.

Toby cocked a fish-scale eye at him, and said: 'Don't shatter my illusions, Inspector. You are worse than Silas Weekley. Silas is always pointing out the nastiness of life. Have you got Silas's alibi, by the way?

'Not vet. I understand that he hardly knew Mr Searle.

'That wouldn't stop Silas. I shouldn't wonder if he did it as a bit of local colour.

'Local colour?

'Yes. According to Silas country existence is one cesspool of rape, murder, incest, abortion, and suicide, and perhaps Silas thinks that it is time that Salcott St Mary lived up to his idea of it. Do you read our Silas, Inspector?

'I'm afraid not.

'Don't apologise. It's an acquired taste. Even his wife hasn't acquired it yet, if all reports are true. But then, poor woman, she is so busy suckling and suffering that she probably has no time to spare for the consideration of the abstract. No one seems to have indicated to her the possibilities of contraception. Of course, Silas has a «thing» about fertility. He holds that the highest function of a woman is the manufacture of progeny. So disheartening for a woman, don't you feel, to be weighed against a rabbit, and to know that she will inevitably be found wanting. Life, by Fertility out of Ugliness. That is how Silas sees it. He hates beauty. Beauty is an offence. He must mash it down and make it fertile. Make mulch of it. Of course he is just a little crazy, poor sweet, but it is a very profitable kind of craziness, so one need not drench oneself in tears about it. One of the secrets of a successful life is to know how to be a little profitably crazy.

Grant wondered whether this was merely a normal sample of Toby's chatter, or whether it was designed to edge him on to Silas Weekley. Where a man's personality is entirely facade, as in the case of Toby Tullis, it was difficult to decide how much of the facade was barricade and how much was mere poster-hoarding.

'You didn't see Searle at all on Wednesday evening? he said.

No, Toby had not seen him. His time for the pub was before dinner, not after.

'I don't want to be intrusive, Inspector, but there seems to me a needless furore over a simple drowning.

'Why drowning?

'Why not?

'We have no evidence at all that Searle was drowned, and some fairly conclusive evidence that he wasn't.

'That he wasn't? What evidence have you that he wasn't?

'The river has been dragged for his body.

'Oh, that!

What we are investigating, Mr Tullis, is the disappearance of a man in Salcott St Mary on Wednesday night.

'You really ought to see the vicar, Inspector. He has the perfect solution for you.

'And what is that?

'The dear vicar believes that Searle was never really here at all. He holds that Searle was merely a demon who took human shape for a little, and disappeared when the joke grew stale or the-the juice ran dry, so to speak.

'Very interesting.

'I suppose you never saw Searle, Inspector?

'Oh, yes. I have met him.

This surprised Toby so much that Grant was amused.

'The demon attended a party in Bloomsbury, just before he came to Salcott, he said.

'My dear Inspector, you *must* see the vicar. This contribution to the predilections of demons is of inestimable value to research.

'Why did you ask me if I had ever seen Searle?

'Because he was so perfectly what one would imagine a materialised demon to be.

'His good-looks, you mean?

'Was it only a question of good-looks? Toby said, half quizzing half in challenge.

'No, said Grant. 'No.

'Do you think Searle was a wrong 'un? Toby said, forgetting the facade for a moment and dropping into the vernacular.

'There is no evidence whatever on that score.

'Ah, me, Toby said, resuming the facade with a small mock-sigh. 'The blank wall of bureaucratic caution. I have few ambitions left in life, Inspector, but one of them is a passionate desire to know what made Leslie Searle tick.

'If I ever find out, bureaucratic caution will crack sufficiently to let you know, Grant said, getting up to go.

He stood for a moment looking out at the bright garden with the gleam of the river at the far end.

'This might be a country house, miles from anywhere, he said.

Toby said that that was one of the charms of Hoo House, but that, of course, most of the cottages on the river side of the street had gardens that ran to the river, but most of them were broken into allotments or market gardens of some sort. It was the keeping of the Hoo House grounds as lawns and trees that made it spacious seeming.

'And the river makes a boundary without breaking the view. It is a sadly mixed blessing, the river.

'Mosquitoes?

'No; every now and then it has an overwhelming desire to get into the house. About once in every six winters it succeeds. My caretaker woke one morning last winter to find the boat knocking against his bedroom window.

'You keep a boat?

'Just as a prop. A punt affair that is pleasant to lie in on summer afternoons.

Grant thanked him for being so helpful, apologised once more for having intruded on his breakfast, and took his leave. Toby showed signs of wanting to show him the house, but Grant avoided that for three reasons: he had work to do, he had already seen most of the house in the illustrated press, and he had an odd reluctance to be shown the world's finest craftsmanship by a slick little operator like Toby Tullis.

Silas Weekly lived in a cottage down the lane that led to the far bend of the river. Or rather, that started off towards the river. The lane, where it met the fields, turned at right-angles along the back of the village, only to turn up again and rejoin the village street. It was an entirely local affair. In the last cottage before the fields lived Silas Weekley, and Grant, 'proceeding' there police-fashion, was surprised to find it so poor a dwelling. It was not only that Weekley was a best-seller and could therefore afford a home that was more attractive than this, but there had been no effort to beautify the place; no generosity of paint and wash such as the other cottagers had used to make the street of Salcott St Mary a delight to the eye. No window plants, no trim curtains. The place had a slum air that was strange in its surroundings.

The cottage door was open and the combined howls of an infant and a child poured out into the sunny morning. An enamel basin of dirty water stood in the porch, the soap bubbles on it bursting one by one in slow resignation. An animal toy of soft fur, so worn and grubby as to be unidentifiable as any known species, lay on the floor. The room beyond was unoccupied for the moment, and Grant stood observing it in a kind of wonder. It was poorly furnished and untidy beyond belief.

The crying continued to come from some room in the rear, so Grant knocked loudly on the front door. At his second knock, a woman's voice called: 'Just leave it there, thank you. At his third knock supplemented with a call, she came from the darkness at the back and moved forward to inspect him.

'Mrs Weekley? Grant said doubtfully.

'Yes, I'm Mrs Weekley.

She must have been pretty once. Pretty and intelligent; and independent. Grant remembered hearing somewhere that Weekley had married an elementary school teacher. She was wearing a sacking apron over a print wrapper, and the kind of old shoes that a woman all too easily gets used to as good enough to do chores in. She had not bothered to put on stockings, and the shoes had left smudges on her bare insteps. Her unwaved hair was pulled back into a tight desperate knot, but the front strands were too short to be confined there for long and now hung down on either side of her face. It was a rather long face and very tired.

Grant said that he would like to see her husband for a moment.

'Oh. She took it in slowly, as if her mind were still with the crying children. 'I'm sorry things are so untidy, she said vaguely. 'My girl from the village didn't come today. She often doesn't. It just depends on how she is feeling. And with the children it is difficult — . I don't think I can disturb my husband in the middle of the morning. Grant wondered whether she considered the children were making no disturbance at all. 'He writes in the morning, you see.

'I see. But if you would give him my card I think he will see me.

'Are you from the publishers?

'No, Ĭ'm —

'Because I think it would be better to wait, and not interrupt him. He could meet you at the Swan, couldn't he? Just before lunch, perhaps.

'No, I'm afraid that I must see him. You see, it is a matter —

'It is very important that he shouldn't be disturbed. It interrupts his train of thought, and then he finds it difficult to-to get back. He writes very slowly-carefully, I mean-sometimes only a paragraph a day, so you see it is —

'Mrs Weekley, Grant said, bluntly, 'please give that card to your husband and say that I must see him, whatever he happens to be doing.

She stood with the card in her fingers, not even glancing at it, her mind obviously busy with the search for some excuse that would convince him. And he was all of a sudden aware that she was afraid to take that card to her husband. Afraid to interrupt him.

To help her, he said that surely there would be no interruption where the children had been making so much noise. Her husband could hardly be concentrating very hard.

'Oh, he doesn't work here, she said. 'In the house, I mean. He has a little house of his own at the end of the garden.

Grant took back the card she was holding, and said grimly: 'Will you show me the way, Mrs Weekley?

Dumbly she led him through a dark kitchen where a toddler sat splay-legged on the floor enjoying his tears, and an infant in a perambulator sobbed in elemental fury. Beyond, in the bright sunshine of the garden, a boy of three or so was throwing stones from the pebble path against the wooden door of an outhouse, an unproductive occupation which nevertheless made a satisfying noise.

'Stop that, Freddy, she said automatically, and Freddy as automatically went on throwing the stones against the door.

The back garden was a long thin strip of ground that ran along the side of the back lane, and at the very end of it, a long way from the house, was a wooden shed. Mrs Weekley pointed it out and said:

'Perhaps you would just go and introduce yourself, would you? The children will be coming in from school for their midday meal and it isn't ready.

'Children? Grant said.

'Yes, the three eldest. So if you don't mind.

'No, of course I don't mind, Grant said. Indeed, few things would please him like interrupting the great Silas Weekley this morning, but he refrained from saying so to Silas Weekley's wife.

He knocked twice on the door of the wooden hut-a very trim wooden hut-without getting an answer, and so opened the door.

Silas Weekley swung round from the table at which he was writing and said: 'How *dare* you walk into my — and then stopped as he saw Grant. He had quite obviously expected the intruder to be his wife.

'Who are you? he said rudely. 'If you are a journalist you will find that rudeness doesn't pay. This is private ground and you are

trespassing.

'I am Detective-Inspector Grant from Scotland Yard, Grant said and watched the news sink home.

After a moment or two Silas got his lower jaw under control again and said: 'And what do you want, may I ask? It was an attempt at truculence and it was not convincing.

Grant said his regulation piece about investigating the disappearance of Leslie Searle and accounting for the movements of all those who knew Searle, and noted with the unoccupied half of his mind that the ink on the script that Weekley was working on was not only dry but dark. It was yesterday's ink. Weekley had done not a line this morning although it was now past noon.

At the mention of Searle Weekley began a diatribe against moneyed dilettantes which-in view of Weekley's income and the sum total of his morning's work-Grant thought inappropriate. He cut him short and asked what he had been doing on Wednesday night.

'And if I do not choose to tell you?

'I record your refusal and go away.

Weekley did not like the sound of this, so he muttered something about being badgered by the police.

'All that I am doing, Grant pointed out, 'is asking for your co-operation as a citizen. As I have pointed out, it is within your right to refuse co-operation.

Silas said sulkily that he had been writing on Wednesday night from supper-time onwards.

'Any witnesses to that? Grant asked, wasting no frills on Silas.

'My wife, of course.

'She was here with you?

'No, of course not. She was in the house.

'And you were here alone?

'I was.

'Thank you and good-morning, Grant said walking out of the hut and shutting the door crisply behind him.

The morning smelt very fresh and sweet. The sour smell of vomited milk and rough-dried dish-cloths that had hung about the house was nothing to the smell of soured humanity that filled the place where Silas Weekley worked. As he walked back to the house he remembered that it was from this joyless and distorted mind that the current English 'masterpieces' came. The thought did nothing to reassure him. He avoided the joyless house, where the agitated clattering of pans (an appropriate orchestration, he couldn't help thinking) conveyed the preoccupation of its mistress, and walked round the side of it to the front gate, accompanied by Freddy.

'Hullo, Freddy, he said, sorry for the bored brat.

'Hullo, Freddy said without enthusiasm.

'Isn't there a more exciting game than flinging stones at a door?

'No, said Freddy.

'Couldn't you find one if you looked about you?

'No, said Freddy, with cold finality.

Grant stood for a moment contemplating him.

'There will never be any doubt about *your* paternity, Frederick, he said, and walked away up the lane to the spot where he had left his car.

It was down this lane that Leslie Searle had walked on Wednesday night, calling farewells to the group in the village street. He had walked past the Weekley cottage to where a stile led into the first of the fields that lay between the village and the river bend.

At least that is what one took for granted that he did.

He could have walked along the back lane and come to the village street again. But there would have been little point, surely, in that. He was never seen again in the village. He had walked into the darkness of the lane and disappeared.

A little crazy, Tullis had said of Silas Weekley. But Silas Weekley didn't strike Grant as being crazy. A sadist, perhaps. A megalomaniac almost certainly. A man sick of a twisted vanity. But actually crazy no.

Or would an alienist think differently?

One of the most famous alienists in the country had once said to him that to write a book was to give oneself away. (Someone else had said the same thing more wittily and more succinctly, but he could not think at the moment who it was.) There was unconscious betrayal in every line, said the alienist. What, wondered Grant, would the alienist's verdict be after reading one of Silas Weekley's malignant effusions? That it was the outpouring of a petty mind, a mere fermentation of vanity? Or that it was a confession of madness?

He thought for a moment of going back to the Swan and ringing up Wickham police station from there, but the Swan would be busy just now and the telephone a far from confidential affair. He decided to go back to Wickham and have lunch there, so that he could see Inspector Rodgers at his leisure and pick up any messages that might be waiting for him from Headquarters.

In Wickham he found the higher orders at the police station preparing to retire into the peace of the weekend, and the lower ranks preparing for the weekly liveliness of Saturday night. Rodgers had little to say-he was never a talkative man-and nothing to report. The disappearance of Searle was the talk of Wickham, he said, now that the morning papers had made it general news; but no one had come in to suggest that they had seen him.

'Not even a «nut» to confess to the murder, he said dryly.

'Well, that is a nice change, Grant said.

'He'll be along, he'll be along, Rodgers said resignedly, and invited Grant home to lunch.

But Grant preferred to eat at the White Hart.

He was sitting in the dining-room of the White Hart eating the unpretentious but ample lunch that they provided, when the radio music in the kitchen ceased, and presently, oddly urbane among the castanet racket, came the voice of the announcer.

'Before the news, here is a police message. Would anyone who gave a lift to a young man on Wednesday night on the road between Wickham and Crome, in Orfordshire, or anywhere in that vicinity, please communicate with Scotland Yard —

'Telephone Whitehall One Two One Two, chanted the kitchen staff happily.

And then there was a rush of high-pitched conversation as the staff fell to on this latest tit-bit of news.

Grant ate the very good roly-poly without relish and went out again into the sunlight. The streets, which had been teeming with Saturday shoppers when he came in to lunch, were deserted, the shops shut. He drove out of town wishing once more that he was going fishing. How had he ever chosen a profession where he could not count on a Saturday afternoon holiday? Half the world was free to sit back and enjoy itself this sunny afternoon, but he had to spend it pottering about asking questions that led nowhere.

He drove back to Salcott in a state of mental dyspepsia, being only slightly cheered by Dora Siggins. He picked up Dora in the long straight of dull hedged lane that ran for a mile or more parallel to the river just outside the town. In the distance he had taken the plodding figure to be a youth carrying a kit of tools, but as he came nearer and slowed in answer to the raised thumb, he found that it was a girl in dungarees carrying a shopping bag. She grinned cheekily at him and said:

'Saved my life, you have! I missed the bus because I was buying slippers for the dance tonight.

'Oh, said Grant, looking at the parcel that had evidently refused to go into the overflowing bag. 'Glass ones?

'Not me, she said, banging the door shut behind her and wriggling comfortably into the seat. 'None of that home-by-midnight stuff about me. 'Sides, it wasn't a glass slipper at all, you know. It was fur. French, or something. We learned that at school.

Grant wondered privately if modern youth had been left any illusions at all. What would a world without fantasy be like? Or did the charming illusion that he was all-important fill for the modern child the place of earlier and more impersonal fantasies? The thought improved his temper considerably.

At least they were quick of wit, these modern children. The cinema, he supposed. It was always the one-and-tuppennys-the regulars-who got the point while the front balcony were still groping. His passenger had got his reference to dance slippers without a second for consideration.

She was a gay child, even after a week's work and missing the bus on a Saturday half-holiday, and poured out her history without any encouragement. Her name was Dora Siggins and she worked at a laundry, but she had a boy friend in a garage at Salcott, and they were going to get married as soon as the boy friend got a rise, which would be at Christmas, if all went as they expected.

When, long afterwards, Grant sent Dora Siggins a box of chocolates as an anonymous tribute to the help she had been to him, he hoped heartily that it would lead to no misunderstanding with the boy friend who was so sure of his rise at Christmas.

'You a commercial? she asked presently, having exhausted her personal story.

'No, said Grant. 'I'm a policeman.

'Go on! she said, and then, struck by the possibility that he might be telling the truth, took a more careful look at the interior of the car. 'Coo! she said at length. 'Blamed if you aren't, at that!

'What convinced you? Grant said curiously.

'Spit and polish, she said. 'Only the fire service and the police have the spare time to keep a car shiny this way. I thought the police were forbidden to give lifts?

'You're thinking of the Post Office, aren't you. Here is Salcott on the horizon. Where do you live?

'The cottage with the wild cherry tree. My, I can't tell you how glad I am I didn't have to walk those four miles. You got the car out on the fly?

'No, Grant said, and asked why she should think that.

'Oh, the plain clothes and all. Thought maybe you were out for the day on your little own. There's one thing you ought to have that the American police have.

'What is that? Grant asked bringing the car to a halt opposite the cottage with the cherry tree.

'Sirens to go yelling along the roads with.

'God forbid, Grant said.

'I've always wanted to go tearing along the streets behind a siren, seeing people scattering every way.

'Don't forget your shoes, Grant said, unsympathetically, indicating the parcel she was leaving on the seat.

'Oh, gee, no; thanks! Thanks a million for everything. I'll never say a word against the police as long as I live.

She ran up the cottage path, paused to wave to him, and disappeared.

Grant moved on into the village to resume his questioning.

When Grant walked into the Mill House at a quarter to seven he felt that he had riddled Salcott St Mary through a small-meshed sieve, and what he had left in the sieve was exactly nothing. He had had a very fine cross-section of life in England, and he was by that much the richer. But towards solving the problem that had been entrusted to him he had advanced not one foot.

Marta greeted him with her best contralto coo and drew him in to peace and refreshment. The living-room of the Mill House stood over the water, and in the daytime its furnishings swam in the wavering light; a green sub-aqueous light. But this evening Marta had drawn the curtains over the last of the sunset, and shut out the river light; she had prepared a refuge of warmth and reassurance, and Grant, tired and perplexed, was grateful to her.

'I am so glad that it is not Walter who has disappeared, she said, wafting him to a chair with one of her favourite gestures and beginning to pour sherry.

'Glad? Grant said, remembering Marta's expressed opinion of Walter.

'If it was Walter who had disappeared, I should be a suspect, instead of a sleeping partner.

Grant thought that Marta as sleeping partner must have much in common with sleeping dogs.

'As it is I can sit at the side of the law and see the wheels go round. Are you being brilliant, my dear?

'I'm flummoxed, Grant said brutally, but Marta took it in her stride.

'You feel that way only because you are tired and hungry; and probably suffering from dyspepsia, anyhow, after having to eat at the White Hart for two days. I'm going to leave you with the sherry decanter and go down and get the wine. Cellar-cooled Moselle. The kitchen is under this room, and the cellar is under the kitchen, and the wine comes up as cold as running water. Oh dear, I promised myself I wasn't going to think of running water any more today. I drew the curtains to shut out the river; I'm not so stuck on the river as I used to be. Perhaps we'll both feel better after the Moselle. When I've brought the wine up from the cellar I'm going to cook you an omelet as only I can cook one, and then we'll settle down. So relax for a little and get back your appetite. If the sherry isn't dry enough for you there's some Tio Pepe in the cupboard; but me, I think it is overrated stuff.

She went away, and Grant blessed her that she had not plagued him with the questions that must have been crowding her mind. She was a woman who not only appreciated good food and good drink but was possessed of that innate good sense that is half-way to kindness. He had never seen her to better advantage than in this unexpected country home of hers.

He lay back in the lamplight, his feet to the whickering logs, and relaxed. It was warm and very quiet. There was no river song: the Rushmere was a silent stream. No sound at all except the small noises of the fire. On the couch opposite him lay a newspaper, and behind it stood a book-case, but he was too tired to fetch either paper or book. At his elbow was a shelf of reference books. Idly he read the titles till he came to the London telephone book. The sight of those familiar volumes sent his mind flying down a new channel. They had said this evening, when he talked to the Yard, that so far Searle's cousin had not bothered to get in touch with them. They were not surprised by that, of course; the news had broken only that morning, and the artist cousin might live anywhere from the Scilly Isles to a farm in Cumberland; she might never read newspapers anyway; she might, if it came to that, be entirely indifferent to any fate that might overtake her cousin. After all, Searle had said quite frankly that they did not care for each other.

But Grant still wanted to talk to someone who knew Searle's background; or at least a little of that background. Now, relaxed and at leisure for the first time in two days, he put out his hand for the S volume, and, on the chance that she lived in London and that she and Searle were the children of two brothers, turned up the Searles. There was a Miss Searle who lived in Holly Pavement, he noticed. Holly Pavement was in Hampstead and was a well-known artist's colony. On an impulse he picked up the telephone and asked for the London number.

'One hour's delay. Call you back, said the triumphant voice at the other end.

'Priority, Grant said. And gave his credentials.

'Oh, said the voice, disappointed but game. 'Oh, well, I'll see what I can do.

'On the contrary, Grant said, I'll see what you can do, and hung up.

He put the telephone book back in its place, and pulled out *Who's Who in the Theatre* to amuse himself with while he waited. Some of it made him feel very old. Actors and actresses he had never heard of already had long lists of successes to their credit. The ones he knew had pages of achievement stretching back into the already-quaint past. He began to look up the people he knew, as one does in the index of an autobiography. Toby Tullis, son of Sydney Tullis and his wife Martha (Speke). It was surprising to think that a national institution like Toby Tullis had ever been subjected to the processes of conception and brought into this world by the normal method. He observed that Toby's early days as an actor were decently shrouded under: 'Was at one time an actor. His one-time colleagues, Grant knew, would deny with heat that he had ever been even approximately an actor. On the other hand, Grant thought, remembering this morning, his whole life was an 'act'. He had created a part for himself and had played it ever since.

It was surprising, too, to find that Marguerite Merriam (daughter of Geoffrey Merriam and his wife Brenda (Mattson)) had been considerably older than her adolescent fragility had led one to believe. Perhaps if she had lived that adolescent quality would have worn thin, and her power to break the public heart would have declined. That was, no doubt, what Marta had meant when she said that if she had lived another ten years her obituaries would have been back-page stuff.

Marta (daughter of Gervase Wing-Strutt, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. and his wife Anne (Hallard)) was, of course, entirely orthodox. She had been educated at the best schools and had sneaked her way on to the stage by the back-door of elocution like so many of her well-bred predecessors. Grant hoped that when in the next edition-or at most the next after-the letters D.B.E. followed Marta's name, it would comfort Gervase Wing-Strutt and his wife Anne for being fooled by their daughter a quarter of a century ago.

He had not even taken the cream off the possible entertainment provided by this enchanting volume when the telephone rang.

'Your call to London is through. Will you go ahead, please, the voice said.

'Hullo, Grant said. 'Could I speak to Miss Searle?

'Miss Searle speaking, said a pleasant voice, a shade on the efficient side.

'Miss Searle, I'm truly sorry to bother you, but have you, by any chance, a cousin called Leslie Searle?

I have, and if he has borrowed money from you you are wasting your time if you think that I will pay it back.

'Oh, no. It is nothing like that. Your cousin has disappeared while staying with friends in the country and we hoped that you might help us to trace him. My name is Grant. I'm a Detective-Inspector at Scotland Yard.

'Oh, said the voice, considering but not apparently dismayed. 'Well, I don't see what help I can be to you. Leslie and I never had much to do with each other. He wasn't my cup of tea, and I certainly am not his.

It would be some help if I could come and talk to you about him. Would you, perhaps, be at home tomorrow afternoon if I called?

'Well, tomorrow afternoon I was going to a concert at the Albert Hall.

'Oh. Then I might manage it just before lunch if that is any better for you.

'You are very accommodating for a policeman, she remarked.

'Criminals don't find us that way, he said.

'I thought providing accommodation for criminals was the end and object of Scotland Yard. It's all right, Inspector. I won't go to the concert. It is not a very good one anyhow.

'You'll be in if I call?

'Yes, I'll be here.

'That is very kind of you.

'That over-rated photographer didn't take the family jewels with him when he left, did he?

'No. Oh, no. He has just disappeared.

She gave a small snort. It was apparent that whatever Miss Searle had to tell him about her cousin there would be no suppression of facts or false modesty in her story.

As Grant hung up, Marta came back preceded by a small boy carrying wood for the fire. The boy put the logs neatly in the hearth, and then eyed Grant with respectful awe.

'Tommy has something he wants to ask you, Marta said. 'He knows that you are a detective.

'What is it, Tommy?

'Will you show me your revolver, sir?

'I would if I had it with me. But it's in a drawer in Scotland Yard, I'm afraid.

Tommy looked cut to the heart. I thought you always carried one. The American cops do. You can shoot, can't you, sir?

'Oh, yes, Grant said relieving the awful fear that was clearly dawning. I'll tell you what, next time you come to London, you can come to Scotland Yard and I'll show you the revolver.

'I can come to the Yard? Oh, thank you. Thank you very much, sir. That would be just bonza.

He went, with a polite goodnight, in an aura of radiance a foot thick.

'And parents think they can cure boys of liking lethal weapons by not giving them toy soldiers, Marta said, as she set the omelet out on the table. 'Come and eat.

'I owe you for a trunk call to London.

'I thought that you were going to relax.

'I was but I got an idea, and it has taken me the first step forward in this case since I took it over.

'Good! she said. 'Now you can feel happy and let your digestive juices do their work.

A small round table had been set near the fire, with candles for pleasure and decoration, and they ate together in a friendly quiet. Mrs Thrupp came up with the chicken, and was introduced, and was volubly grateful for Grant's invitation to Tommy. After that peace was uninterrupted. Over coffee the talk went to Silas Weekley and the oddness of the menage in the lane.

'Silas prides himself on living «working-class», whatever that may mean. None of his children is going to begin any better off than he did. He's a frightful bore about his elementary school origins. You would think he was the first elementary schoolboy to go to Oxford since the place was founded. He's the classic case of inverted snobbery.

'But what does he do with all the money he makes?

'God knows. Buries it under the floor of that little hut where he works, perhaps. No one is ever allowed to go inside that hut.

'I interviewed him in that hut this morning.

'Alan! How clever of you! What was inside?

'One well-known writer, doing very little work.

'I expect he sweats blood over his writing. He has no imagination, you know. I mean, he has no idea how another person's mind works. So his situations, and his characters' reaction to the situations, are all cliches. He sells because of his "elemental strength", God save us all. Let us push back the table and get nearer the fire.

She opened a cupboard, and said in an excellent imitation of the boys who used to sell things off trays on railway platforms: 'Drambuie, Benedictine, Strega, Grand Marnier, Bols, Chartreuse, Slivovitz, Armagnac, Cognac, Rakia, Kummel, Various French Sirops of Unspeakable Sweetness, and Mrs Thrupp's Ginger Cordial!

 $\hbox{'Is it your intention to seduce official secrets from the Criminal Investigation Department?}\\$

'No, darling; I am offering homage to your palate. You are one of the few men I know who possesses such a thing.

She put the Chartreuse and the liqueur glasses on a tray and arranged her long legs in comfort on the couch.

'Now tell me, she said.

'But I have nothing to tell, he protested.

'I don't mean that kind of tell. I mean talk at me. Pretend I'm your wife-which God forbid-and just make an audience of me. For instance, you don't really think that that poor stick Walter Whitmore ever got up enough red blood to tap the Searle boy on the head, do

you?

'No, I don't think so. Sergeant Williams calls Walter a pushee, and I think I agree with him.

'Calls him a what?

Grant explained, and Marta said: 'And how right your Sergeant Williams is! Walter's taking-off is long overdue.

'He may do his own taking-off if this affair isn't cleared up.

'Yes, I suppose he is having a bad time, poor silly creature. The gossip in a small country place is deadly. Have you had any answer to your police appeal, by the way? I heard it at one o'clock.

'No, not up to six-forty-five, when I last talked to the Yard. I gave them this number for the next two hours. I hope you don't mind.

'Why do you think he might have been given a lift?

'Because if he isn't in the river he must have walked away from it.

'Of his own accord? But that would be a very odd thing to do.

'He may be suffering from amnesia. There are five possibilities altogether.

'Five!

'On Wednesday night Searle walked away down that lane, healthy and sober; and he has not been near since. The possibilities are: one, that he fell into the water accidentally and was drowned; two, that he was murdered and thrown in the river; three, that he walked away for reasons of his own; four, that he wandered away because he forgot who he was and where he was going; five, that he was kidnapped.

'Kidnapped!

'We don't know anything about his American life; we have to make allowances for that. He may even have come to this country to get away from the States for a little. I shan't know about that until we have a report about him from the Coast-if then! Tell me, what did *you* think of Searle?

'In what wav?

'Well, would you say he was a practical joker, for instance?

'Anything but.

'Yes. Liz Garrowby was against that too. She said he wouldn't think a practical joke funny. How impressed do you think he was with Liz Garrowby? You were there to dinner.

'Impressed enough to make Walter sick with jealousy.

'Really?

'They were nice together, Leslie and Liz. They were a natural pair, somehow. Something that Walter and Liz will never be. I don't think Walter knows anything about Liz; and I had an idea that Leslie Searle knew quite a lot.

'Did you like him when you met him? You took him back with you that night, after dinner.

'Yes. Yes to both. I liked him with reservations.

'What kind of reservations?

'It's difficult to describe. I could hardly take my eyes off him, and yet he never struck me as being-real. That sounds mad, doesn't it.

'You mean there was something phony about him?

'Not in the accepted sense. He was obviously what he said he was. In any case, our Miss Easton-Dixon bears witness to that, as you probably know.

'Yes, I was talking to Miss Easton-Dixon this afternoon about him. Her photograph of him may prove very useful. What did you and Searle talk about, the night you brought him back with you?

'Oh, cabbages and kings. People he had photographed. People we had both met. People he wanted to meet. We spent a long time in mutual adoring of Danny Minsky, and another long time in furious disagreement about Marguerite Merriam. Like everyone else he thought Marguerite the world's genius, and wouldn't hear a word against her. I got so annoyed with him that I told him a few hometruths about Marguerite. I was ashamed of myself afterwards. It's a mean thing to break children's toys.

'I expect it did him good. He was too old to have the facts of life kept from him.

'I hear you've been collecting alibis today.

'How did you hear?

'The way I hear everything. From Mrs Thrupp. Who are the unlucky people who have none?

'Practically the whole village, including Miss Easton-Dixon.

'Our Dixie is «out». Who else?

'Miss Lavinia Fitch.

'Dear Lavinia! Marta said, laughing outright at the thought of Miss Fitch on murder bent.

'Liz Garrowby?

'Poor Liz must be having a thin time over this. I think she was half in love with the boy.

'Mrs Garrowby?

Marta paused to consider this. 'Do you know, I wouldn't put it past the woman. She would do it and not turn a hair because she would persuade herself that it was the right thing to do. She'd even go to church afterwards and ask God's blessing on it.

Toby Tullis?

'N-o, I hardly think so. Toby would find some other way of getting even. Something much less risky for Toby and just as satisfying. Toby is fertile in inventing small revenges. I don't think he would need to murder anyone.

'Silas Weekley?

'I wonder. I wonder. Yes, I think Silas would commit murder. Especially if the book he happened to be writing at the moment was not going well. The books are Silas's outlet for his hatred, you see. If that was dammed up he might kill someone. Someone who seemed to him rich and well-favoured and undeservedly fortunate.

'You think Weekley mad?

'Oh, yes. Not certifiable perhaps, but definitely unbalanced. Is there any truth, by the way, in the rumour of a quarrel between Walter and the Searle boy?

'Whitmore denies that it was a quarrel. He says it was "just a spat".

'So there was bad feeling between them?

'I don't know if we have even evidence for that. A temporary annoyance is hardly the same thing as bad feeling. Men can disagree quite fundamentally in a pub of an evening without any fundamental bad feeling on either side.

'Oh, you are maddening. Of course there was bad feeling, and of course we know why. It was about Liz.

'Having no connections in the Fourth Dimension, I couldn't say, Grant said, mocking her jumped-to conclusion. 'Whitmore said Searle was «provocative». What, can you tell me from your point of vantage, would he be provocative about?

'He probably told Walter how little he appreciated Liz, and that if Walter didn't mend his ways he would take Liz from him, and if Walter thought he wasn't up to it he was wrong and he would get Liz to pack and walk away with him by a week next Tuesday, and there was five pounds that said he was right. And Walter said, very huffy and stiff, that in this country we did not bet on the possible bestowal of women's favours, at least gentlemen didn't, and to put five pounds on Liz was simply insulting (Walter has no sense of the ridiculous at all, you know; that is how he perpetrates those broadcasts and endears himself to old ladies who avoid the country like the plague and wouldn't know a wren if they saw one); and Leslie probably said that if he thought a fiver too little he was willing to make it ten, since if Liz had been engaged to a prig like Walter for nearly twelve months she was just ripe for a change and the ten would be just found money, and so then Walter got up and went out and banged the door behind him.

'How did you know about the banged door?

'My dear soul, everyone in Orfordshire knows about the banged door by this time. That is why Walter is suspect Number One. Is that all your list of Lacking Alibis, by the way?

'No, there is Serge Ratoff.

'Oh. What was Serge doing?

'Dancing on the greensward by the river in the dark.

'That has the ring of truth, anyhow.

'Why? Have you seen him?

'No. But it is just the kind of thing Serge would do. He is still full of the idea of a come-back, you know. Before the scene about Leslie Searle, he was planning the come-back as a way of pleasing Toby; now he is planning it just to «show» Toby.

'Where do you get all this inside knowledge?

'I haven't played parts for twenty-five years on just the producer's directions, she said.

He looked across at her, elegant and handsome in the firelight, and thought of all the different parts that he had seen her play: courtesans and frustrated hags, careerists and domestic doormats. It was true that actors had a perception, an understanding of human motive, that normal people lacked. It had nothing to do with intelligence, and very little to do with education. In general knowledge Marta was as deficient as a not very bright child of eleven; her attention automatically slid off anything that was alien to her own immediate interests and the result was an almost infantine ignorance. He had seen the same thing in hospital nurses, and sometimes in overworked G.P.s. But put a script in her hands, and from a secret and native store of knowledge she drew the wherewithal to build her characterisation of the author's creation.

'Supposing that this really is a case of homicide, he said. 'Judging entirely on looks and recent form, so to speak, who would you put your money on?

She considered this for a little, turning her empty liqueur glass in the firelight.

'Emma Garrowby, I think, she said at last. 'Could Emma have done it? Physically speaking, I mean.

'Yes. She left Miss Easton-Dixon where their ways parted on Wednesday night, and after that time was her own. No one knows what time she came back to Trimmings. The others had gone to bed; or rather, to their rooms. It is Mrs Garrowby who locks up the front of the house, anyhow.

'Yes. Ample time. It isn't so very far from Trimmings to that bend in the river. I do wonder what Emma's shoes were like on Thursday morning. Or did she clean them herself.

'Believe me, if there was any unwonted mud on the shoes she cleaned them herself. Mrs Garrowby looks to me a very methodical person. Why do you pick on Emma Garrowby?

'Well, I take it you commit murder because you are one-idead. Or have become one-idead. As long as you have a variety of interests you can't care about any one of them to the point of murder. It is when you have all your eggs in the same basket, or only one egg left in the basket, that you lose your sense of proportion. Do I make myself clear, Inspector Grant?

'Perfectly.

'Good. Have some more Chartreuse. Well, Emma seems to me the most concentrated of the possible suspects. No one could call Serge concentrated, except on the thing of the moment. Serge spends his life having flaring rows, and has never shown signs of killing anyone. The farthest he ever gets is to fling whatever happens to come handiest.

'Lacking a whip, Grant said; and told her of his interview with Serge. 'And Weekley?

'On form, to use your own excellent metaphor, Silas is only a pound or two behind Emma; but quite definitely behind. Silas has his own success, his family, the books he is going to write in the future (even if they are just the same old ones over again in different words); Silas's interest isn't *channelled* the way Emma's is. Short of having a brain-storm, some unreasoning hatred, Silas would have no urge to get rid of Leslie. Nor would Toby. Toby's life simply corruscates with variety. Toby would never think of killing anyone. As I told you, he has too many other ways of making the score even. But Emma. Emma has nothing but Liz.

She thought it over for a moment, and Grant let the silence lie uninterrupted.

'You should have seen Emma when Walter and Liz announced their engagement, she said at last. 'She-she positively *glittered*. She was a walking Christmas tree. It was what she had always wanted, and against all probability it had happened. Walter, who met all the clever and beautiful women of this generation, had fallen in love with Liz and they were going to be married. Walter would get

Trimmings one day, and Lavinia's fortune, so even if his vogue went they would have as much of this world's goods as anyone could possibly want or use. It was a fairy-tale come true. She was floating just an inch or two off the ground. Then Leslie Searle came. Marta, the actress, let the silence come back. And being also an artist she left it unbroken.

The logs slipped and spluttered, sending up fresh jets of flame, and Grant lay still in his chair and thought about Emma Garrowby. And about the two things that Marta did not know.

It was odd that Marta's chosen suspect should occupy the same area as the two unaccountables in this case: the glove in Searle's drawer, and the space in the photographic box.

Emma. Emma Garrowby. The woman who had brought up a younger sister and when that sister moved out from under her wing married a widower with a young child. She channelled her interest as naturally as Toby Tullis spread his wide, didn't she? She had been radiant-'a walking Christmas tree'-over the engagement; and in the period since that engagement (it was five months, he happened to know, not twelve) her initial delight must have spread and amplified to something much more formidable; an acceptance; a sense of achievement, of security. The engagement had stood whatever small shocks it had encountered in these five months, and Emma must have got used to thinking of it as safe and immutable.

And then, as Marta said, Leslie Searle.

Searle with his charm and his fly-by-night life. Searle with his air of being not quite of this world. No one could view this modern shower of gold with more instant distrust than Emma Garrowby.

'What would fit into a space 10-1/2 inches, by 3-1/2 by 4? he asked.

'A hair brush, said Marta.

There was a game played by psychologists, Grant remembered, where the victim said the first thing that occurred to him on hearing a given word. It must work out pretty well, all things considered. He had put this same proposition to Bill Maddox, and Maddox, as unhesitatingly as Marta had said 'A hairbrush', had said 'A spanner'. He remembered that Williams had proffered a bar of soap.

'Anything else?

'A set of dominoes. A box of envelopes? No, a shade on the small side. Packs of cards? Enough cards to set up on a desert island! Table cutlery. The family spoons. Someone been secreting the family silver?

'No. It is just something I wondered about.

'If it's the Trimmings silver, just let it go, my dear. It wouldn't fetch thirty shillings the lot at an auction sale. Her eye went in unconscious satisfaction to the Georgian simplicity of her own implements on the table behind her. 'Tell me, Alan, it wouldn't be indiscreet or unprofessional, would it, to tell me who is your own favourite for the part?

'The part?

'The killer.

'It would be both unprofessional and indiscreet. But I don't think there is any wild indiscretion in telling you that I don't think there is one.

'What! You really think Leslie Searle is still alive? Why?

Why indeed, he asked himself. What was there in the set-up that gave him this feeling of being at a performance? Of being pushed into the stalls so that an orchestra pit intervened between him and reality. The Assistant Commissioner had once said to him in an unwonted moment of expansiveness that he had the most priceless of all attributes for his job: flair. 'But don't let it ride you, Grant, he had said. 'Keep your eye on the evidence. Was this a sample of letting his flair ride him? The chances were ninety-nine to one that Searle had fallen into the river. All the evidence pointed that way. If it hadn't been for the complication of the quarrel with Whitmore, he, Grant, would not have entered into the affair at all; it would have been a simple case of 'missing believed drowned'.

And yet. And yet. Now you see it, now you don't. That old conjurer's phrase. It haunted him.

Half consciously he said it aloud.

Marta stared and said: 'A conjuring trick? By whom? For what?

'I don't know. I just have a strong feeling that I'm being taken for a ride!

'You think that Leslie just walked away somehow?

'Or someone planned it to look like that. Or something. I have a strong feeling of watching something being sawn in half.

'You're overworking, Marta said. 'Where do you think Leslie could have disappeared to? Unless he just came back to the village and lay doggo somewhere.

Grant came wide awake and regarded her with admiration. 'Oddly enough, he said, amused, 'I had never thought of that. Do you think Toby is hiding him to make things difficult for Walter?

'No, I know it doesn't make sense. But neither does your idea about his walking away. Where would he walk to in the middle of the night in nothing but flannels and a raincoat?

'I shall know more about that when I have seen his cousin tomorrow.

'He has a cousin? How surprising. It's like finding Mercury with an in-law. Who is he?

'It's a woman. A painter, I understand. A delightful creature who has given up an Albert Hall Sunday afternoon concert to be at home for me. I used your telephone to make an assignation with her.

'And you expect her to know why Leslie walked away in the middle of the night in nothing but flannels and a raincoat?

'I expect her to be able to suggest where Leslie might have been headed for.

'To borrow the callboy's immortal phrase: I hope it keeps fine for you, Marta said.

Grant drove back to Wickham through the spring night, cheered in body and soul.

And Emma Garrowby sat beside him all the way.

Flair might whisper soft seductions to him, but Emma was there in the middle of the picture, where Marta had set her, and she was much too solid to be conjured away. Emma made sense. Emma was example and precedent. The classic samples of ruthlessness were domestic. The Lizzie Bordons. Emma, if it came to that, was primordial. A female creature protecting its young. It required immense ingenuity to find a reason why Leslie Searle should have chosen to disappear. It needed no ingenuity at all to suggest why Emma Garrowby should have killed him.

In fact, it was a sort of perversity to keep harking back to the idea that Searle might have ducked. He could just hear the A.C. if he ever came before him with a theory like that. Evidence, Grant, suggestive evidence. Common sense, Grant, common sense. Don't let your flair ride you, Grant, don't let your flair ride you. Disappear of his own accord? This happy young man who could pay his bills at the Westmorland, buy expensive clothes to wear and expensive sweets to give away, travel the world at other people's expense? This young man of such surprising good-looks that every head he encountered was turned either literally or metaphorically? This charming young man who liked plain little Liz so much that he kept a glove of hers? This professionally successful young man who was engaged in a deal that would bring him both money and kudos?

Common sense, Grant. Evidence, Grant. Don't let your flair ride you.

Consider Emma Garrowby, Grant. She had the opportunity. She had the motive. And, on form, she probably had the will. She knew where the camp was that night.

But she didn't know that they had come in to Salcott for a drink.

He wasn't drowned in Salcott.

She couldn't have known that she would find him alone. It was sheer chance that they separated that night.

Someone found him alone. Why not Emma?

How could it happen?

Perhaps she arranged it.

Emma! How?

Has it struck you that Searle engineered that exit of Walter's?

No. How?

It was Searle who was provocative. He provoked Walter to the point where he couldn't stand it a minute longer, and had either to go or stay and have a row. Searle got rid of Walter that evening.

Why should he?

Because he had an appointment.

An appointment! With whom?

Liz Garrowby.

That is absurd. There is no evidence whatever that the Garrowby girl had any serious interest in —

Oh, it was not Liz who sent Searle the message to meet her.

No? Who then?

Emma.

You mean that Searle went to meet someone he thought was Liz?

Yes. He behaved like a lover, if you think about it.

How?

Do you remember how he took farewell of his acquaintances that night? The banter about going to their beds on so fine a spring night? The gaiety? The on-top-of-the-worldness?

He had just had several beers.

So had his companions. Some of them a great deal more than several. But were they singing metaphorical songs to the spring night? They were not. They were taking the shortest cut home to bed, even the youngest of them.

Well, it's a theory.

It is more than that. It is a theory in accordance with the evidence.

Evidence, Grant, evidence.

Don't let your flair ride you, Grant.

All the way along the dark lanes between Salcott St Mary and Wickham, Emma Garrowby sat beside him. And when he went to bed he took her with him.

Because he was tired, and had dined well, and had at last seen a path of some kind open in front of him, he slept well. And when his eyes opened in daylight on The Hour Cometh in purple wool cross-stitch, he regarded the text as a promise rather than a warning. He looked forward to going to town, if only as a mental bath after his plunge into Salcott St Mary. He could then come back and see it in proportion. You couldn't get the flavour of anything properly unless you cleaned your palate between times. He had wondered often how married men managed to combine their domestic lives with the absorbing demands of police work. It occurred to him now for the first time that married life must be the perfect palate-cleanser. There could be nothing like a spell of helping young Bobby with his algebra to bring you back with a fresh mind to the problem of the current crime.

At least he would be able to get some clean shirts, he thought. He put his things into his bag, and turned to go down to breakfast. It

was Sunday and still early, but they would manage to give him something. As he opened the door of his room the telephone rang.

The White Hart's only concession to progress was to install bedside telephones. He crossed the room to the instrument and picked it up.

'Inspector Grant? said the voice of the landlord. 'Just a minute please; you're wanted on the phone. There was a moment's silence, and then he said: 'Go ahead, please; you're through.

'Hullo.

'Alan? said Marta's voice. 'Is that you, Alan?

'Yes, it's me. You're awake early aren't you?

'Listen, Alan. Something has happened. You must come out straight away.

'Out? To Salcott, you mean?

'To the Mill House. Something has happened. It's very important or I wouldn't have called you so early.

'But what has happened? Can't you —

'You're on a hotel telephone, aren't you.

Yes.

'I can't very well tell you, Alan. Something has turned up. Something that alters everything. Or rather, everything you-you believed in, so to speak.

'Yes. All right. I'll come at once.

'Have you had breakfast?

'Not yet.

'I'll have some ready for you.

What a woman, he thought as he put back the receiver. He had always thought that the first requisite in a wife was intelligence, and now he was sure of it. There was no room in his life for Marta, and none in her life for him; but it was a pity, all the same. A woman who could announce a surprising development in a homicide case without babbling on the telephone was a prize, but one who could in the same breath ask if he had had breakfast and arrange to supply him with the one he had not had was above rubies.

He went to collect his car, full of speculation. What could Marta possibly have unearthed? Something that Searle had left the night he was there? Some piece of gossip that the milkman had brought?

One thing was certain: it was not a body. If it had been a body Marta, being Marta, would have conveyed as much, so that he could bring out with him all the necessary paraphernalia and personnel to deal with such a discovery.

It was a day of high wind and rainbows. The halcyon time of windless sunlight that comes each year to the English spring when the first dust lies on the roads was over. Spring was all of a sudden wild and robust. Glittering showers slanted across the landscape. Great clouds soared up over the horizon and swept in shrieking squalls across the sky. The trees cowered, and plumed themselves, and cowered again.

The countryside was deserted. Not because of the weather but because it was Sunday. Some of the cottages, he observed, still had their blinds drawn. People who got up at the crack of dawn during the week, and had no animals to get them up on Sunday, must be glad to sleep late. He had grumbled often when his police duties had broken into his private life (a luxury grumble, since he could have retired years ago when his aunt left him her money), but to spend one's life in bondage to the predilections of animals must be a sad waste of a free man's time.

As he brought the car up to the landward side of the Mill House, where the door was, Marta came out to greet him. Marta never 'dressed the part' in the country as so many of her colleagues did. She looked on the country rather as the country people themselves did, as a place to be lived in; not something that one put on specially bright and casual clothes for. If her hands were cold she wore gloves. She did not feel that she must look like a gypsy just because she happened to live in the Mill House at Salcott St Mary. She was therefore looking as chic and sophisticated this morning as though she were receiving him on the steps of Stanworth. But he thought she had a shocked look. Indeed she looked as though she had quite lately been very sick.

'Alan! You can't imagine how glad I was to hear your voice on the telephone. I was afraid that you might have gone to town, early as it was.

'What is this that has turned up so unexpectedly? he asked making for the door. But she led him round and down to the kitchen door at the side of the house.

'It was your follower, Tommy Thrupp, that found it. Tommy is mad on fishing. And he quite often goes out before breakfast to fish, because apparently that is a good time. The 'apparently' was typically Marta, he thought. Marta had lived by the river for years and still had to take someone else's word about the proper time for fishing. 'On Sundays he usually takes something in his pocket and doesn't come back-something to eat, I mean-but this morning he came back inside an hour because he had-because he had caught something very odd.

She opened the bright green door and led him into the kitchen. In the kitchen were Tommy Thrupp and his mother. Mrs Thrupp was huddled over the stove as if she also was feeling not too well, but Tommy came to meet them in sparkling form. There was nothing sickly about Tommy. Tommy was transfigured. He was translated. He was six feet high and crowned with lightning.

'Look, sir! Look what I fished up! he said, before Marta could say anything, and drew Grant to the kitchen table. On the table, carefully placed on several thicknesses of newspaper so as to preserve the scrubbed perfection of the wood, was a man's shoe.

'I'll never be able to bake on that table again, moaned Mrs Thrupp, not looking round.

Grant glanced at the shoe and remembered the police description of the missing man's clothes.

'It's Searle's, I take it, he said.

'Yes, Marta said.

It was a brown shoe, and instead of being laced it was tied with a buckle and strap across the instep. It was water-logged and very muddy.

'Where did you fish it up, Tommy?

'Bout a hundred yards down-stream from the big bend.

'I suppose you didn't think of marking the place?

'A course I marked it! Tommy said, hurt.

'Good for you. Presently you'll have to show me the place. Meanwhile wait here, will you. Don't go out and talk about this.

'No, sir, I won't. No one's in on this but me and the police.

A little brightened by this version of the situation, Grant went upstairs to the telephone in the living-room and called Inspector Rodgers. After some delay, since the station had to connect him to the Rodgers's home, he was put through to him, and broke the news that the river would have to be dragged again and why.

'Oh, lord! groaned Rodgers. 'Did the Thrupp boy say where he fished it up?

'About a hundred yards down from the big bend, if that conveys anything to you.

'Yes. That's about two hundred yards down-stream from where they had their bivouac. We did that stretch with a small-tooth comb. You don't think that perhaps — ? Does the shoe look as if it had been in the water since Wednesday night?

'It does indeed.

'Oh, well. I'll make arrangements. It would happen on a Sunday, wouldn't it?

'Do it as quietly as you can, will you? We don't want more spectators than we can help.

As he hung up Marta came in with a tray and began to put his breakfast on the table.

'Mrs Thrupp is still what she calls «heaving», so I judged it better to do your breakfast myself. How do you like your eggs? Sunny side up?

'If you really want to know, I like them broken when they are half cooked and rummelled up with a fork.

'Panache! Marta said, delighted. 'That is one I have not met before. We are growing intimate, aren't we! I am probably the only woman alive except your housekeeper who knows that you like your breakfast eggs streaky. Or-am I?

'Well, there's a woman in a village near Amiens that I once confessed it to. But I doubt if she would remember.

'She is probably making a fortune out of the idea. Eggs *a l'Anglaise* probably has a totally new meaning in France nowadays. Brown bread or white?

'Brown, please. I'm going to have to owe you for another trunk call. He picked up the telephone again and called Williams's home address in London. While he waited for the connection he called Trimmings and asked to speak to the housekeeper. When Mrs Brett a little breathless, arrived on the wire he asked who was in the habit of cleaning the shoes at Trimmings and was told that it was the kitchen girl, Polly.

'Could you find out from Polly whether Mr Searle was in the habit of taking off his brown buckled shoes without unbuckling them, or if he always unbuckled them first?

Yes, Mrs Brett would do that, but wouldn't the Inspector like to speak to Polly himself?

'No, thank you. I'll confirm anything she says, later on, of course. But I think she is less likely to get flustered if you ask her a quite ordinary question than if she was brought to the telephone to be questioned by a stranger. I don't want her to be agitated into thinking about the question at all. I want her first natural reaction to the question. Were the shoes buckled or unbuckled when she cleaned them?

Mrs Brett understood, and would the Inspector hang on?

'No. I'm expecting an important call. But I shall call you back in a very short time.

Then London came on the wire, and Williams's not-too-pleased voice could be heard telling the Exchange: 'All right, all right, I've been ready any time this last five minutes.

'That you, Williams? This is Grant. Listen. I was coming up to town today to interview Leslie Searle's cousin. Yes, I found out where she lived. Her name is Searle. Miss Searle. And she lives at 9 Holly Pavement, in Hampstead. It's a sort of coagulation of artists. I talked to her last night on the telephone and I arranged to see her this afternoon about three. Now I can't. A boy has just fished a shoe belonging to Leslie Searle out of the river. Yes, all right, crow! So we have to start dragging all over again, and I have to be here. Are you free to go and see Miss Searle for me, or shall I get someone else from the Yard?

'No, I'll go, sir. What do you want me to ask her?

'Get everything she knows about Leslie Searle. When she saw him last. What friends he had in England. Everything she can give you about him.

'Very good. What time shall I call you back?

'Well, you ought to be there at a quarter to three, and leaving an hour clear-four o'clock, perhaps.

'At the Wickham station?

'Well, no, perhaps not. In view of the slowness of dragging, perhaps you had better call me at the Mill House at Salcott. It is Salcott 5.

It was only when he had hung up that he realised that he had not asked Williams how his mission to Benny Skoll had turned out. Marta came in with his breakfast, and as she poured his coffee he talked to Trimmings again.

Mrs Brett had talked to Polly, and Polly had no doubt about the matter at all. The straps on Mr Searle's brown shoes had always been undone when he put them out for cleaning. She knew because she used to rebuckle them so as to keep the straps from banging about when she cleaned them. She buckled them to keep the straps still and unbuckled them when she had finished.

So that was that.

He began to eat his breakfast, and Marta poured out a cup of coffee for herself and sat sipping it. She looked cold and pale, but he could not resist the question:

'Did you notice anything odd about the shoe?

'Yes. It hadn't been unfastened.

A marvellous woman. He supposed that she must have vices to counterbalance so many excellences but he couldn't imagine what they could be.

It was very cold by the river. The willows shivered, and the water was pewter colour, its surface alternately wrinkled by the wind and pitted by the passing showers. As the slow hours went by Rodgers's normally anxious face slipped into a settled melancholy, and the tip of his nose peering out from the turned-up collar of his waterproof was pink and sad. So far no intruders had come to share their vigil. The Mill House had been sworn to secrecy and had not found the secrecy any strain; Mrs Thrupp had retired to bed, still 'heaving'; and Tommy, as police ally, was part of the dragging party. The wide sweep of the river across the alluvial land was far from road or path and devoid of dwellings, so there were no passers-by to stop and stare, to pause for a little and then go on to spread the news.

They were in a world by themselves down there by the river. A timeless world, and comfortless.

Grant and Rodgers had exhausted professional post-mortems long ago, and had got no further. Now they were just two men alone in a meadow on a chilly spring day. They sat together on the stump of a fallen willow, Grant watching the slow sweep of the questing drag, Rodgers looking out across the wide flats of the valley floor.

'This is all flooded in winter, he said. 'Looks quite lovely, too, if you could forget the damage it's doing.

"Swift beauty come to pass

Has drowned the blades that strove",

Grant said.

'What is that?

'What an army friend of mine wrote about floods.

"Where once did wake and move

The slight and ardent grass.

Swift beauty come to pass

Has drowned the blades that strove."

'Nice, Rodgers said.

'Sadly old-fashioned, Grant said. 'It sounds like poetry. A fatal defect, I understand.

'Is it long?

'Just two verses and the moral.

'What is the moral?

"O Final Beauty, found

In many a drowned place,

We love not less thy face

For lesser beauties drowned."

Rodgers thought it over. 'That's good, that is, he said. 'Your army friend knew what he was talking about. I was never one for reading poems in books-I mean collections, but magazines sometimes put verses in to fill up the space when a story doesn't come to the bottom of the page. You know?

'I know.

'I read a lot of these, and every now and then one of them rings a bell. I remember one of them to this day. It wasn't poetry properly speaking, I mean it didn't rhyme, but it got me where I lived. It said:

"My lot is cast in inland places,

Far from sounding beach

And crying gull,

And I

Who knew the sea's voice from my babyhood

Must listen to a river purling

Through green fields,

And small birds gossiping

Among the leaves."

'Now, you see, I was bred by the sea, over at Mere Harbour, and I've never quite got used to being away from it. You feel hedged in, suffocated. But I never found the words for it till I read that. I know exactly how that bloke felt. "Small birds gossiping!"

The scorn and exasperation in his voice amused Grant, but something amused him much more and he began to laugh.

'What's funny? Rodgers asked, a shade defensively.

'I was just thinking how shocked the writers of slick detective stories would be if they could witness two police inspectors sitting on a willow tree swapping poems.

'Oh, them! Rodgers said, in the tone that in lower circles is followed by a spit. 'Ever read any of these things?

'Oh, yes. Now and then.

'My sergeant makes a hobby of it. Collects the howlers. His record so far is ninety-two to a book. In a thing called *Gods to the Rescue* by some woman or other. He stopped to watch something and added: 'There's a woman coming now. Pushing a bike.

Grant took a look and said: 'That's not a woman. It's a goddess to the rescue.

It was the unconquerable Marta, with vacuum flasks of hot coffee and sandwiches for all.

'The bicycle was the only way I could think of for carrying them, she explained, 'but it is,

'How did you get through them, then?

'I unloaded the bicycle, lifted the thing over, and loaded it again the other side.

'The spirit that made the Empire.

'That's as may be, but Tommy must come with me on the way back, and help me.

'Sure I will, Miss Hallard, Tommy said, his mouth full of sandwich.

The men came up from the river and were presented to Marta. It amused Grant to notice the *cameraderie* of those who quite patently had never heard of her, and the awed good manners of those who had.

'I think the news has leaked out, Marta said. 'Toby rang me up and asked if it was true that the river was being dragged again.

'You didn't tell him why?

'No. Oh, no, she said, her face going a little bleak again at the memory of the shoe.

By two o'clock in the afternoon they had a large attendance. And by three o'clock the place was like a fair, with the local constable making valiant efforts to preserve some kind of decency.

At half-past three, when they had dragged the river almost as far as Salcott itself and had still turned up nothing. Grant went back to the Mill House and found Walter Whitmore there.

'It was kind of you to send us the message, Inspector, he said. 'I should have come to the river, but somehow I couldn't.

'There was not the slightest need for you to come.

'Marta said that you were coming back here at teatime, so I waited here. Any-results?

'Not so far.

'Why did you want to know about the shoe, this morning?

'Because it was fastened when found. I wanted to know if Searle normally pulled off those shoes without unbuckling them. Apparently he always unbuckled them.

'Then why-how could the shoe be fastened now?

'Either it was sucked off by the current, or he kicked it off to make swimming easier.

'I see, Walter said, drearily.

He refused tea, and went away looking more disorientated than ever.

'I do wish I could be as sorry for him as I should be, Marta said. 'China or Indian?

Grant had had three large cups of scalding tea (_So_ bad for your inside! Marta said) and was beginning to feel human again, when Williams rang to report.

The report, in spite of Williams's best endeavours, was meagre. Miss Searle didn't like her cousin and made no bones about it. She, too, was an American, but they had been born at opposite sides of the United States and had never met until they were grown up. They had fought at sight, apparently. He sometimes rang her up when he came to England, but not this time. She had not known that he was in England.

Williams had asked her if she was out a lot, and if she thought it possible that Searle could have called, or telephoned, and not found her. She said that she had been in the Highlands, painting, and that Searle might have called her many times without her knowledge. When she was away the studio was empty and there was no one to take telephone messages.

'Did you see the paintings? Grant asked. 'The ones of Scotland.

'Oh, yes. The place was full of them.

'What were they like?

'Very like Scotland.

'Oh, orthodox.

'I wouldn't know. The west of Sutherland and Skye, mostly.

'And about his friends in this country?

'She said she was surprised to hear that he had any friends anywhere.

'She didn't suggest to you that Searle was a wrong 'un?

'No, sir. Nothing like that.

'And she couldn't suggest any reason why he should suddenly disappear, or where he could disappear to?

'No, she couldn't. He has no people, she did tell me that. Parents dead, apparently; and he was an only child. But about his friends she seemed to know nothing. What he said about having only a cousin in England was true, anyhow.

'Well, thank you very much, Williams. I quite forgot to ask you this morning if you found Benny?

'Benny? Oh, yes. Quite easily.

'And did he cry?

Grant heard Williams laugh.

'No. He pulled a new one this time. He pretended to faint.

'What did that get him?

'It got him three free brandies and the sympathy of the multitude. We were in a pub, I need hardly say. After the second brandy he began to come to and moan about the way he was being persecuted, so they gave him a third. I was very unpopular.

Grant considered this a fine sample of understatement.

'Luckily it was a West End pub, Williams said. This, being translated, meant that there was no actual interference with his performance of his duty.

'Did he agree to go with you for questioning?

'He said he would go if I let him telephone first. I said he knew quite well that he was free to telephone anyone at any hour of the day or night-that was a Post Office arrangement-but if his call was innocent I supposed he didn't mind my being the fly on the telephone-booth wall.

'And did he agree?

'He practically dragged me into the box. And who do you think that little bastard was telephoning to?

His M.P.?

'No. I think M.P.s are a bit shy of him nowadays. He overstayed his welcome last time. No, he rang up some bloke he knows who writes for the *Watchman* and told him the tale. Said he was no sooner «out» than some policeman or other was on his tail wanting him to go to Scotland Yard for questioning, and how was a man to go straight if he was having an innocent drink with his friends who didn't know anything about him, and an obvious plain-clothes tec came up and wanted to speak to him, and so on and go on. Then he came with me, quite pleased with himself.

'Was he any help to the Yard?

'No, but his girl was.

'Did she blab?

'No, she was wearing Poppy's earrings. Poppy Plumtre's.

'No!

'If we didn't happen to be taking Benny out of circulation for a little, I think his girl would put him out of it for good. She's raving mad. He hasn't had her very long, and it seems she was thinking of leaving him, so Benny «bought» her a pair of diamond earrings. The amount of intelligence Benny has wouldn't inconvenience a ladybird.

'Did you get the rest of Poppy's stuff?

'Yes. Benny coughed up. He hadn't had time to get to a fence with them.

'Good work. What about the Watchman?

'Well, I did want to let that *Watchman* bit of silliness stew in his own juice. But the Super wouldn't let me. Said it was no good having trouble that we could avoid even if we had the pleasure of seeing the *Watchman* making a fool of itself. So I had to ring him up and tell him.

'At least you must have got something back out of that.

'Oh, yes. Yes. I don't deny I got some kick out of that. I said: "Mr Ritter, I'm Detective-Sergeant Williams. I was present when Benny Skoll rang you up a few hours ago." "You were *present*?" he said. "But he was lodging a complaint against you!" "Oh, yes," I said. "It's a free country you know." "I don't call it so free for some," he said. "You were dragging him away to be questioned at Scotland Yard." I said I invited him to accompany me, and he didn't have to if he didn't want to.

'Then he gave me the old spiel about hounding criminals, and Benny Skoll having paid his debt to Society, and that we had no right to hound him now that he was a free man again, and so forth. "You have shamed him before his friends," says Mr Ritter, "and pushed him back to hopelessness. How much the better is Scotland Yard for having badgered poor little Benny Skoll this afternoon?"

""Two thousand pounds worth," I said.

"What?" he said. "What are you talking about?"

"That is the amount of jewellery he stole from Poppy Plumtre's flat on Friday night."

"How do you know it was Benny?" he asked.

'I said Benny had handed over the loot in person, with the exception of two large single diamond earrings which were gracing the ears of his current lady friend. Then I said: "*Good*night, sir", very sweet and low, the way they do in the Children's Hour, and hung up. You know, I think he had already written that letter about poor innocent Benny. He was so dashed. Writers must feel very flat when they've written something that no one can use.

'Wait till Mr Ritter's flat is burgled, Grant said. 'He'll come to us screaming for the criminal's blood.

'Yes, sir. Funny, isn't it? They're always the worst when it happens to themselves. Any word from San Francisco?

'Not yet, but it may come any minute. It doesn't seem so important now.

'No. When I think of the whole notebook I filled interviewing bus conductors in Wickham! No good for anything but the wastepaper basket.

'Never throw notes away, Williams.

'Keep them for seven years and find a use for them?

'Keep them for your autobiography, if you like, but keep them. I would like to have you back here, but at the moment the work doesn't warrant it. It is just a matter of standing about in the cold.

'Well, I hope something turns up before sunset, sir.

'I hope it does. Literally.

Grant hung up and went back to the river-bank. The crowd had thinned a little as people began to go home to their Sunday high-tea, but the solid core who would happily starve in order to see a man's dead body dragged from the river were still there. Grant looked at their blue moronic faces and speculated for the thousandth time since he became a policeman about what made them tick. One thing was certain; if we revived public executions tomorrow, the 'gate' would be of cup-tie proportions.

Rodgers had gone back to Wickham, but it seemed that the Press had arrived; both the local man and the Crome correspondent of the London dailies wanted to know why the river was being re-dragged. There was also the Oldest Inhabitant. The Oldest Inhabitant had a nose and chin that approximated so closely that Grant wondered how he shaved. He was a vain old party but he was the representative in this gathering of something more powerful than any of them: Race Memory; and as such was to be respected.

'No use you draggin' any furner'n the village, he said to Grant, as one giving the under-gardener instructions.

'No?

'No. No use. She lets everything down, there. Down into the mud.

'She' was evidently the river.

'Whv?

'She go slow there. Tired, like. Drops everything. Then when she be round the turn, half-way to Wickham there, she go tearing off agin all light and happy. Ah. That is what she do. Drops everything she be carrying into the mud, and then she go quiet for a little,

lookin' round t'see if people notice what she done, then woops! she be off to Wickham at the tear. He cocked a surprisingly clear blue eye at Grant. 'Sly, he said. 'That's what she be. Sly!

Rodgers had said, when first he had talked to him, that it was no use dragging below Salcott St Mary, and he had accepted the local man's verdict without asking for an explanation. Now here was Race Memory offering him the explanation.

'Not much use you draggin' anyway, said Race Memory, wiping the drop from its nose with a gesture that was subtly contemptuous.

'Why? Don't you believe there is a body there?

'Oh, ah! Body there all right. But that mud there, it don't give up nothin' 'cept in its own time.

'And when is that likely to be, would you say?

'Oh! Any time 'tween a thousand years and tomorrow. Powerful sticky that mud be. Quicksand mud. When my great-grandfer were a little boy he had a barra run down the bank, like, into the water. Quite shallow it were there. He could see the barra but he were frightened, see, to wade in for it. So he run to the cottage. No more'n a few yards. And brung his father out to reach the barra for him. But the mud had it. Ah. The mud had it in the time you'd turn yer back. Not a blink of the barra left. Not even when they got a rake and dragged for it. The mud had it, see. Cannibal mud, that is, I tell ee, cannibal mud.

'But you say it does give up its victims sometimes.

'Oh. Ah. Happen.

'When? In flood?

'Nah! In flood she just spread herself. Go broody and drop more mud'n ever. Nah. But sometime she be taken aback. Then she let go in surprise.

'Taken aback?

'Ah. Same as she were a week since. Cloud come and hit the high country above Otley and burst there, and pour water into the river like someone pouring bathwater away. She have no time to spread out decent and quiet. The water come down channel like a scouring brush and churn her up. Then happen sometimes she loose something from the mud.

It was a poor outlook, Grant felt, if he had to wait until the next cloudburst to recover Searle's body. The gathering greyness of the day depressed him; in a couple of hours they would have to call it off. By that time, moreover, they would have reached Salcott, and if they had found nothing, what hope was there? He had had a horrible feeling all day that they were merely scratching the surface of that 'immemorial mud'. If this second dragging proved useless, what then? No inquest. No case. No nothing.

By the time a watery sunset was bathing the scene in pallid light they were within fifty yards of the end of their beat. And at that moment Rodgers reappeared and produced an envelope from the pocket of his coat.

'This came for you when I was at the station. It's the report from the States.

There was no urgency about it now, but he opened it and read it through.

The San Francisco police had no record against Leslie Searle, and knew of none. He was in the habit of coming to the Coast for the winter months. For the rest of the year he travelled and photographed abroad. He lived well but very quietly, and there was no record of expensive parties or other extravagances of conduct. He had no wife with him and no history of emotional entanglements. The San Francisco police had no record of his origins but they had applied to the Publicity department at Grand Continental, for which studio Searle had photographed Lotta Marlow and Danny Minsky, the reigning stars of the moment. According to Grand Continental, Searle had been born in Jobling, Conn. Only child of Durfey Searle and Christina Mattson. Police at Jobling, Conn., asked about the Searles, said they left town more than twenty years ago and went South somewhere. Searle was a chemist, with a passion for photography, but that is all anyone remembered about them.

Well, it was a dull enough report. An uninspiring collection of unhelpful facts. No clue to the thing he had wanted most; Searle's intimates in the States. No illumination on Searle himself. But something in the report rang a bell in his head.

He read it over again, waiting for that warning click in his mind that was like the sound a clock makes when it is preparing to strike. But this time there was no reaction.

Puzzled, he read it through again, slowly. What was it that had made that warning sound in his mind? He could find nothing. Still puzzled, he folded up the paper and put it away in his pocket.

'We're finished, I suppose you know? Rodgers said. 'We'll find nothing now. Nothing has ever been taken back from the river at Salcott. In this part of the country they have a proverb. When they want to say: Give a thing up, or: Put it out of your mind for good, they say: "Throw it over the bridge at Salcott".

'Why don't they dredge the channel instead of letting all this stuff silt up on them, Grant said, out of temper. 'If they did they wouldn't have the river flooding their houses every second winter.

Rodgers's long face shortened into amusement and kindliness. 'If you'd ever smelt a bucket of Rushmere mud, you'd think a long time before you'd willingly arrange for it to be dragged up in wagon loads and carted through the street. Shall I stop them now?

'No, said Grant, mulishly. 'Let them go on dragging as long as the light lasts. Who knows, we may make history and be the first to take something back from the river at Salcott. I never did believe in those country superstitions, anyhow.

They did go on dragging till the light went, but the river gave nothing back.

'Shall I give you a lift back to Wickham, Rodgers asked Grant, but Grant said no, that he had his own car up at the Mill House and would walk up and fetch it.

Marta came out into the windy twilight to meet him, and put her arm through his.

'No? she said.

'No.

'Come in and get warm.

She walked beside him in silence into the house and poured him an out-size whisky. The thick walls shut out the sound of the wind, and the room was quiet and warm as it had been last night. A faint smell of curry came up from the kitchen.

'Do you smell what I am cooking for you?

'Curry. But you can't be expected to feed the Department.

'Curry is what you need after a whole day of our English spring glories. You can, of course, go back to the White Hart and have the usual Sunday evening supper of cold tinned beef, two slices of tomato, three cubes of beetroot, and a wilting lettuce leaf.

Grant shivered unaffectedly. The thought of the White Hart on a Sunday evening was death.

'Besides, tomorrow I shan't be here to give you dinner. I am going back to town. I can't stand the Mill House any more at the moment. I'll stay in town till *Faint Heart* goes into rehearsal.

'Having you here has practically saved my life, Grant said. He pulled the American report from his pocket and said: 'Read that, would you, and tell me if anything rings a bell for you.

'No, she said, having read. 'No bells. Should it?

'I don't know. It seemed to me when I read it first that it rang a bell in my mind. He puzzled over it again for a moment and then put it away.

'When we are both back in town, Marta said, 'I want to be introduced to your Sergeant Williams. Perhaps you would bring him to dinner one night?

'But of course, Grant said, pleased and amused. 'Why this sudden passion for the unknown Williams?

'Well, I have actually two different reasons. The first is that anyone who has the mother-wit to see that Walter Whitmore is a «push-ee» is worth meeting. And the second is that the only time I have seen you look happy today was after talking to Sergeant Williams on the telephone.

'Oh, that! he said; and told her about Benny Skoll, and the *Watchman*, and Williams rebuking virtue. And so they were gay after all over their Sunday supper, with Marta supplying libellous stories of the *Watchman*'s theatre critic. So that it was not until he was going that she asked what he was going to do now that the search for Searle had failed.

'I tidy up some ends here in Salcott tomorrow morning, he said, 'and then I go back to London to report to my chief.

'And what happens then?

'There is a conference to decide what action, if any, is to be taken.

'I understand. Well, when you have got things straightened out ring me up and tell me, won't you. And then we can arrange a night when Sergeant Williams is free.

How admirable, he thought as he drove away; how truly admirable. No questions, no hints, no little feminine probings. In her acceptance of a situation she was extraordinarily masculine. Perhaps it was this lack of dependence that men found intimidating.

He went back to the White Hart, called the police station to know if there were any messages, picked the menu off the dining-room sideboard to verify Marta's prognostication as to supper (she had forgotten the stewed rhubarb and custard, he must tell her) and for the last time went to bed in the little room under the roof. The text was no promise tonight. The Hour Cometh, indeed. What a lot of leisure women seemed to have had once. Now they had everything in cans and had no leisure at all.

But no, it wasn't that, of course. It was that they didn't spend their leisure making texts in coloured wools any more. They went to see Danny Minsky and laughed themselves sick for one-and-tuppence, and if you asked him it was a better way of recovering from the day's work than making meaningless patterns in purple cross-stitch. He glared at the text, tilted the lamp until the shadow blotted out his vision of it, and took his notebooks to bed with him.

In the morning he paid his bill, and pretended not to see the landlord's surprise. Everyone knew that the river-dragging had been unsuccessful, and everyone knew that a piece of clothing recovered from the river had caused that dragging (there, were various accounts of which particular piece of clothing), so the landlord hardly expected Scotland Yard to be taking its departure at this juncture. Unless there was a clue that no one knew about?

'Coming back, sir?

'Not immediately, Grant said, reading his mind like a book and not particularly liking the stigma of failure that was being tacked on to his name at this moment.

And he headed for Trimmings.

The morning had an air of bland apology. It was smiling wetly and the wind had died. The leaves glittered and the roads steamed in the sun. 'Just my fun, dears, the English spring was saying to the soaked and shivering mortals who had trusted her.

As the car purred along the slope, towards Trimmings, he looked down at Salcott St Mary in the valley, and thought how odd it was that three days ago it was just a name that Marta used occasionally in conversation. Now it was part of his mind.

And God send it wasn't going to be a burr stuck there for good!

At Trimmings he was received by the refayned Edith, who broke down enough to look humanly scared for a moment when she saw

him, and asked to see Walter. She showed him into the fireless library; from which Walter rescued him.

'Come into the drawing-room, he said. 'We use it as a living-room and there is a fire there'; and Grant caught himself wondering ungratefully whether it was his own comfort that Walter was considering or his guest's. Walter did affect one that way, he observed.

'I am going back to town this morning, Grant said, 'and there are one or two small points I want to clear up before I make my report to my superiors.

'Yes? Walter was nervous and looked as if he had not slept.

When I asked you about your journey down the Rushmere, you said that you had picked up mail at arranged post-offices.

'Yes

'On Monday there would have been nothing to pick up, but on Tuesday and Wednesday you presumably picked up what there was. Did Searle have any letters on either of those two days, can you remember?

'There's no difficulty in remembering. Inspector, Searle *never* had *any* mail.

'Never? You mean Searle had no letters at all while he was at Trimmings?

'None that I ever knew about. But Liz would tell you. She deals with the post when it comes in.

How had he missed this small item of information, he wondered.

'Not even forwarded from his hotel or bank?

'Not that I know of. He may have been letting it mount up. Some people are constitutionally indifferent to letters.

That was true; and Grant left it there.

'Then about this daily telephoning, he said. 'You telephoned from Tunstall on Sunday night, from Capel on Monday night, from Friday Street on Tuesday, and from where on Wednesday?

'There's a call-box at Pett's Hatch. We had meant to camp actually at Pett's Hatch, but that ruined mill looked dreary somehow, and I remembered the sheltered bit farther on where the river turns south, so we went on to there.

'And you told Trimmings about this proposed camp.

'Yes, I told you already that we did.

'I know you did. I don't mean to badger you. What I want to know now is who talked to whom during that call from Pett's Hatch?

Walter thought for a moment. 'Well, I talked to Miss Fitch first because she was always waiting for the call, then Searle talked to her. Then Aunt Em came-Mrs Garrowby-and talked to Searle for a little and then I finished up by talking to Mrs Garrowby myself. Liz hadn't come in from an errand in the village, so neither of us talked to her on Wednesday.

'I see. Thank you. Grant waited, and then said: 'I suppose you don't feel able yet to tell me what the subject of your-disagreement was on Wednesday night? And as Walter hesitated: 'Is it because it was about Miss Garrowby that you are reluctant to discuss it?

'I don't want her dragged into this, Walter said, and Grant could not help feeling that this cliche was less the result of emotion than of a conviction that it was thus an Englishman behaved in the circumstances.

'I ask, as I said before, more as a way of obtaining enlightenment on the subject of Leslie Searle than of pinning you down to anything. Was there anything in that conversation, apart from Miss Garrowby's entry into it, that you would rather I didn't know?

'No. of course not. It was just about Liz-about Miss Garrowby. It was an extremely silly conversation.

Grant smiled heartlessly. Mr Whitmore, a policeman has experienced the absolute in silliness before he has finished his third year in the force. If you are merely reluctant to put silliness on record, take heart. To me it will probably sound like something near wisdom.

'There was no wisdom about it. Searle had been in a very odd mood all the evening.

'Odd? Depressed? Surely, thought Grant, we aren't going to have to consider suicide at this late stage.

'No. He seemed to be invaded by an unwonted levity. And on the way from the river he began to twit me about-well, about my not being good enough for Liz. For my fiancee. I tried to change the subject, but he kept at it. Until I grew annoyed. He began enumerating all the things he knew about her that I didn't. He would trot out something and say: "I bet you didn't know that about her."

'Nice things?

'Oh, yes, Walter said instantly. 'Yes, of course. Charming things. But it was all so needless and so provocative.

'Did he suggest that he would be more appreciative in your place?

'He did more. He said quite frankly that if he put his mind to it he could cut me out. He could cut me out in a fortnight, he said.

'He didn't offer to bet on it, I suppose? Grant couldn't help asking.

'No, Walter said, looking a little surprised.

Grant thought that some day he must tell Marta that she had slipped up in one particular.

'It was when he said that, Walter said, 'about cutting me out, that I felt I couldn't stand him any more that night. It wasn't the suggestion of my not being his equal that I resented, I hope you understand, Inspector; it was the implied reflection on Liz. On Miss Garrowby. The implication that she would succumb to anyone who used his charms on her.

'I understand, said Grant gravely. 'Thank you very much for telling me. Do you think, then, that Searle was deliberately provoking a quarrel?

'I hadn't thought of it. I just thought he was in a provocative mood. That he was a little above himself.

'I see. Thank you. Could I speak to Miss Fitch for just one moment. I won't keep her.

Walter took him to the morning-room where Miss Fitch, with a yellow and a red pencil stuck in her ginger bird's-nest and another in her mouth, was prowling up and down like an enraged kitten. She relaxed when she saw Grant, and looked tired and a little sad.

'Have you come with news, Inspector? she asked, and Grant, looking past her, saw the fright in Liz's eyes.

'No, I've come to ask you one question, Miss Fitch, and then I shan't bother you again. I apologise for bothering you as it is. On Wednesday night you were waiting for the evening call from your nephew with an account of their progress.

Yes.

'So that you talked to him first. I mean first of the people at Trimmings. Will you go on from there?

'Tell you what we talked about, you mean?

'No; who talked to whom.

'Oh. Well, they were at Pett's Hatch-I suppose you know-and I talked to Walter and then to Leslie. They were both very happy.

Her voice wavered. 'Then I called Emma-my sister-and she spoke to them both.

'Did you wait while she spoke to them?

'No, I went up to my room to see Susie Sclanders's imitations. She does ten minutes on a Wednesday once a month, and she is wonderful, and of course I couldn't listen to her properly with Em talking.

'I see. And Miss Garrowby?

'Liz arrived back from the village just too late to talk to them.

'What time was this, do you remember?

'I don't remember the exact time, but it must have been about twenty minutes before dinner. We had dinner early that night because my sister was going out to a W.R.I. meeting. Dinner at Trimmings is always being put either back or forwards because someone is either going somewhere or coming from some place.

'Thank you very much, Miss Fitch. And now, if I might see Searle's room once more I won't bother you again.

'Yes, of course.

'I'll take the Inspector up, Liz said, ignoring the fact that Walter, who was still hovering, was the normal person to escort him.

She got up from the typewriter before Miss Fitch could intervene with any alternative proposal, and led the Inspector out.

'Are you going away because you have come to a conclusion, Inspector, or because you haven't; or shouldn't I ask that? she said as they went upstairs.

'I am going as a matter of routine. To do what every officer is expected to do; to present his report to his seniors and let them decide what the facts add up to.

'But you do some adding first, surely.

'A lot of subtraction, too, he said, dryly.

The dryness was not lost on her. 'Nothing makes sense in this case, does it, she agreed. 'Walter says he couldn't have fallen into the river accidentally. And yet he did fall in. Somehow.

She paused on the landing outside the tower room. There was a roof-light there and her face was clear in every detail as she turned to him and said: 'The one certain thing in this mess is that Walter had nothing to do with Leslie's death. Please believe that, Inspector. I'm not defending Walter because he is Walter and I am going to marry him. I've known him all my life, and I know what he is capable of and what he is not capable of. And he is not capable of using physical violence to anyone. Do please believe me. He-he just hasn't the *guts*.

Even his future wife thought him a pushee, Grant observed.

'Don't be misled by that glove, either. Inspector. Do please believe that the most probable explanation is that Leslie picked it up and put it into his pocket meaning to give it back to me. I have looked for the other one of the pair in the car pocket and it isn't there, so the most likely explanation is that they fell out, and Leslie found one and picked it up.

'Why didn't he put it back in the car pocket?

'I don't know. Why does one do anything? Putting something in one's pocket is almost a reflex. The point is that he wouldn't have kept it for the sake of keeping it. Leslie didn't feel about me like that at all.

The point, Grant thought to himself, wasn't whether Leslie was in love with Liz, but whether Walter believed Liz to be in love with Leslie

He longed to ask Liz what happens to a girl when she is engaged to a pushee and along comes a left-over from Eden, an escapee from Atlantis, a demon in plain clothes. But the question, though pertinent, would certainly be unproductive. Instead, he asked her if Searle had ever received letters during his stay at Trimmings and she said that as far as she knew he had had none. Then she went away downstairs, and he went into the tower room. The tidy room where Searle had left everything except his personality.

He had not seen it in daylight before, and he spent a few moments having a look at the garden and the valley from the three huge windows. There was one advantage in not caring what your house looked like when it was finished; you could have your windows where they were likely to do most good. Then he turned once more to the task of going through Searle's belongings. Patiently, garment by garment, article by article, he went through them, vainly hoping for some sign, some revelation. He sat in a low chair with the photographic box open on the floor between his feet, and accounted for everything that a photographer might conceivably use. He could think of nothing-neither chemical nor gadget-that was missing from the collection. The box had not been moved since last he saw it, and the empty space still held the outline of what had been abstracted.

It was an innocent space. Articles are abstracted every day from packed cases, leaving the outline of their presence. There was no reason whatever to suppose that what had been taken out was of any significance. But why, in heaven's name, couldn't anyone suggest what that thing might have been?

Once more he tried the small cameras in the space, knowing quite well that they would not fit. He even clapped a pair of Searle's shoes together and tried to fit them into the space. They were half an inch too long and the soles protruded above the general level so that the tray would not fit home and the lid was prevented from shutting. Anyhow, why carry clothing in a photographic box when you had ample room in the appropriate cases? Whatever had occupied the space had not been put in at random or in haste. It had been a neat and methodical packing.

Which suggested that the thing was put there because only Searle himself would have the unpacking of it.

Well, this, in the elegant phrase, was where he got off.

He put everything neatly back as he had found it; took another look at the Rushmere valley, and decided that he had had enough of it; and closed the door on the room where Leslie Searle had left everything but his personality.

It was grey in town, but it was a friendly grey and comforting after the rainy levels of the Rushmere. And the young green of the trees in Westminster was vivid as fire against the dark background. It was nice to be among his own kind again; to get into that mental undress that one wears among one's colleagues; to talk the allusive unexplanatory talk that constituted Headquarters' 'shop'.

But it was not so nice to think of the coming interview with Bryce. Would it be one of Bryce's good days or one of his 'off' ones? The Superintendent's average was one off day to three good ones, so the odds were three to one in his favour. On the other hand it was damp weather and the Superintendent's rheumatism was always worst in damp weather.

Bryce was smoking a pipe. So it was one of his good days. (On his off days he lit cigarettes and extinguished them in the ashtray five seconds after he had extinguished the match.)

Grant wondered how to begin. He couldn't very well say: Four days ago you handed over a situation to me, and the situation as far as I'm concerned is in all essentials exactly what it was four days ago. But that, put brutally, was how the case stood.

It was Bryce who saved him. Bryce examined him with his small shrewd eyes, and said: 'If ever I saw "Please, sir, it wasn't me" written on a man's face, it is on yours now, and Grant laughed.

'Yes, sir. It's a mess. He laid his notebooks on the table and took the chair at the other side of the table that was known in the office as the Suspect's Seat.

'You don't think that Bunny-Boy Whitmore did it, then?

'No, sir. I think it's unlikely to the point of absurdity.

'Accident?

'Bunny-Boy doesn't think so, Grant said with a grin.

'Doesn't he, indeed. Hasn't he even enough sense to come in out of the rain?

'He's a simple sort of creature, in some ways. He just doesn't believe that it was accident, and says so. The fact that it would be to his advantage to have it proved an accident is irrelevant in his view, apparently. He is wildly puzzled and troubled about the disappearance. I am quite sure he had nothing to do with it.

'Any alternative suggestion?

'Well, there is someone who had the opportunity, the motive, and the means.

'What are we waiting for? Bryce said, flippant.

'Unfortunately the fourth ingredient is missing.

'No evidence.

'Not one sliver of a tittle.

Who is it?

'The mother of Walter Whitmore's fiancee. Stepmother actually. She brought Liz Garrowby up from babyhood and is fanatically maternal about her. I don't mean possessive, but —

'All the best for our Liz.

'Yes. She was enormously pleased about her stepdaughter marrying her nephew, and keeping everything in the family, and I think Searle looked like upsetting the apple-cart. That is a possible motive. She has no alibi for the night in question, and she could have reached the place where they were camped quite easily. She knew where it was because each evening the men telephoned Trimmings, the Fitch place, to report progress, and on Wednesday night they described the place where they were going to bivouac.

But she couldn't know that the men would quarrel and go back to the river separately. How was she going to work it?

'Well, there's an odd thing about that quarrel. Searle from all accounts was a markedly equable person, but it was he who provoked that quarrel. At least Whitmore says so, and I have no reason to doubt him. He twitted Whitmore about not being good enough for Liz Garrowby and boasted that he could take her from him in a week. He was quite sober, so anything so completely out of character must have had an ulterior motive.

'You think he manufactured a parting with Searle that evening? Why?

'It *could* have been because he hoped to meet Liz Garrowby somewhere. The Garrowby girl was not at home that evening when the two men telephoned, so Mrs Garrowby did proxy. I suggest that she might also have done proxy in a more serious way.

"Liz says will you meet her at the third oak past the old mill".

'Something like that.

'And then raging mother waits for him with a blunt instrument and tips the body into the river. I wish to heaven you had been able to recover that body.

'You don't wish it as badly as I do, sir. Without a corpse where are we?

'Even with a corpse you have no case.

'No. But it would be comforting, not to say illuminating, to know the state of the skull bones.

'Any evidence that Searle was interested in the girl?

'He had one of her gloves in his collar drawer.

Bryce grunted. I thought that sort of thing went out with valentines, he said, unconsciously paraphrasing Sergeant Williams.

I showed it to her and she took it well. Said that he had probably picked it up and meant to give it back to her.

'And now I'll tell one, commented the Superintendent.

'She's a nice girl, Grant said, mildly.

'So was Madeleine Smith. Any second favourite in the suspect stakes?

'No. Just the field. The men who had no reason to love Searle, and had the opportunity and no satisfactory alibi.

'Are there many? Bryce said, surprised by the plural.

'There's Toby Tullis, who is still sick at the snubbing Searle administered. Tullis lives on the river-bank and has a boat. His alibi depends on the word of an infatuated follower. There's Serge Ratoff the dancer, who loathed Searle because of the attention Toby paid him. Serge, according to himself, was dancing on the greensward by the river's rim on Wednesday night. There's Silas Weekley, the distinguished English novelist, who lives in the lane down which Searle disappeared from human ken on Wednesday night. Silas has a thing about beauty; has a constant urge to destroy it. He was working in a hut at the end of the garden that night, so he says.

'No bets on the field?

'N-o. I think not. A saver on Weekley, perhaps. He is the type that might go over the borderline any day, and spend the rest of his life happily typing away in Broadmoor. But Tullis wouldn't jeopardise all he has built up by a silly murder like this. He is much too shrewd. As for Ratoff, I can imagine him setting off to do a murder, but long before he was half-way there he would have another fine idea and forget what he originally set out to do.

'Is this village entirely inhabited by crack-pots?

'It has been «discovered», unfortunately. The aborigines are sane enough.

'Well, I suppose there is nothing we can do until the body turns up.

'If it turns up.

'They usually do, in time.

'According to the local police, five people have been drowned in the Rushmere in the last forty years. That is, leaving Mere Harbour and the shipping part out of the reckoning. Two were drowned higher up than Salcott and three lower down. The three who were drowned lower down than Salcott all turned up within a day or two. The two who were drowned above the village have never turned up at all.

'It's a nice look-out for Walter Whitmore, Bryce commented.

'Yes, Grant said, thinking it over. 'They weren't very kind to him this morning.

'The papers? No. Awfully good-mannered and discreet but they couldn't have made pleasant reading for Bunny-Boy. A nasty spot to be in. No accusation, so no possible defence. Not that he *has* any, he added.

He was silent for a little, tapping his teeth with his pipe as was his habit when cogitating.

'Well, I suppose there is nothing we can do at the moment. You make a neat shipshape report and we'll see what the Commissioner says. But I don't see that there is anything more we can do. Death by drowning, no evidence so far to show whether accidental or otherwise. That's your conclusion, isn't it?

As Grant did not answer immediately, he looked up and said sharply: 'Isn't it?

Now you see it, now you don't.

Something wrong in the set-up.

Don't let your flair ride you, Grant.

Something phoney somewhere.

Now you see it, now you don't.

Conjurer's patter.

The trick of the distracted attention.

You could get away with anything if you distracted the attention.

Something phoney somewhere....

'Grant!

He came back to the realisation of his chief's surprise. What was he to say? Acquiesce and let it go? Stick to the facts and the evidence, and stay on the safe side?

With a detached regret he heard his own voice saying: 'Have you ever seen a lady sawn in half, sir?

'I have, Bryce said, eyeing him with a wary disapproval.

'It seems to me that there is a strong aroma of sawn-lady about this case, Grant said; and then remembered that this was the metaphor he had used to Sergeant Williams.

But Bryce's reaction was very different from the Sergeant's.

'Oh, my God! he groaned. 'You're not going to do a Lamont on us, are you, Grant?

Years ago Grant had gone into the farthest Highlands after a man and had brought him back; brought him back sewn up in a case so fault-proof that only the sentence remained to be said; and had handed him over with the remark that on the whole he thought they had got the wrong man. (They had.) The Yard had never forgotten it, and any wild opinion in contradiction to the evidence was still known as 'doing a Lamont'.

The sudden mention of Jerry Lamont heartened Grant. It had been even more absurd to feel that Jerry Lamont was innocent, in the face of an unbreakable case, than it was to smell 'sawn-lady' in a simple drowning.

Grant!

'There's something very odd about the set-up, Grant said stubbornly.

'What is odd?

'If I knew that it would be down in my report. It isn't any one thing. It's the-the whole set-up. The atmosphere. The smell of it. It doesn't smell right.

'Couldn't you just explain to an ordinary hard-working policeman what smells so wrong about it?

Grant ignored the Superintendent's heavy-handedness, and said:

'It's all wrong from the beginning, don't you see. Searle's walking in from nowhere, into the party. Yes, I know that we know about him. That he is who he says he is, and all that. We even know that he came to England just as he says he did. Via Paris. His place was booked by the American Express office at the Madeleine. But that doesn't alter the fact that the whole episode has something queer

about it. Was it so likely that he would be all that keen to meet Walter just because they were both friends of Cooney Wiggin?

'Don't ask me! Was it?

'Why this need to meet Walter?

'Perhaps he had seen him broadcast and just couldn't wait.

'And he had no letters.

'Who hadn't?

'Searle. He had no letters all the time he was at Salcott.

Perhaps he is allergic to the gum on envelopes. Or I have heard that people leave letters lying at their bank to be called for.

'That's another thing. None of the usual American banks or agencies has ever heard of him. And there is one tiny thing that seems odd to me out of all proportion to its actual value. Actual value to this case, I mean. He had a tin box, rather like an outsize paint-box, that he used to hold all his photographic stuff. Something is gone out of the box. Something roughly 9 inches by 3–1/2 by 4, that was packed in the lower compartment (it has a tray like a paint-box with a deeper space below). Nothing that is now among his belongings fits the space, and no one can suggest what the thing could have been.

'And what is so odd about that? There must be a hundred and one things that might have been packed in a space that size.

'As what, for instance, sir?

'Well-well, I can't think off-hand, but there must be dozens.

'There is ample space in his other cases for anything he wanted to pack. So it wouldn't be clothes, or ordinary possessions. Whatever was there, in the tin box, was something that he kept where only he would be likely to handle it.

Bryce's attention grew more sober at that.

'Now it is missing. It is of no obvious importance in this case. No importance at all, perhaps. It is just an oddity and it sticks in my mind.

'What do you think he might have been after at Trimmings? Blackmail? Bryce asked, with interest at last.

'I don't know. I hadn't thought of blackmail.

'What could have been in the box that he could turn into cash? Not letters, that shape. Documents, perhaps? Documents in a roll.

'I don't know. Yes, perhaps. The thing against the blackmail idea is that he seemed to have ample means.

'Blackmailers usually have.

'Yes. But Searle had a profession that kept him very nicely. Only a hog would want more. And somehow he didn't look to me like a hog.

'Be your age, Grant. Just sit quiet for a moment and think of the blackmailers you have known. He watched this shot go home, and said, dryly: 'Exactly! And then: 'Who would you say was the blackmailee at Trimmings? Mrs Garrowby got a past, do you think?

'Possibly, Grant said, considering Emma Garrowby in a new light. 'Yes, I think it's quite possible.

'Well, the choice isn't very wide. I don't suppose Lavinia Fitch was ever out on the tiles?

Grant thought of kind, anxious little Miss Fitch, with the bristling pencils in her mop of hair, and smiled.

'There isn't much choice, you see. I suppose if it was blackmail at all it must have been Mrs Garrowby. So your theory is that Searle was murdered for a reason that has nothing to do with Liz Garrowby. And as Grant made no immediate answer to that, 'You believe that it was murder, don't you.

'No.

'No!

'I don't believe he's dead.

There was a moment of silence. Then Bryce leaned forward over the table and said with immense self-control: 'Now, look here, Grant. Flair's flair. And you're entitled to your whack of it. But when you take to throwing it about in chunks it becomes too much of a good thing. Have a little moderation, for Pete's sake. You've been dragging a river for a whole day yesterday trying to find a drowned man, and now you have the nerve to sit there and tell me you don't think he was drowned at all. What do you think he did? Walked away barefoot? Or hobbled away disguised as a one-legged man supported by crutches which he had tossed off in an idle moment from a couple of oak branches? Where do you think he went to? What is he going to live on from now on? Honestly, Grant, I think you must need a holiday. What, just tell me what, put this notion into your head? How does a trained detective mind jump from a straightforward case of "missing believed drowned" into a wild piece of fantasy that has no connection with anything in the case at all?

Grant was silent.

'Come on, Grant. I'm not ribbing you. I really want to know. How do you arrive at the conclusion that a man isn't drowned after finding his shoe in the river? How did the shoe get there?

'If I knew that, sir, I'd have my case.

'Did Searle have a spare pair of shoes with him?

'No. Just the ones he was wearing.

'The one that was found in the river.

'Yes, sir.

'And you still think he didn't drown?

Yes.

There was a silence.

'I don't know which to admire more, Grant: your nerve or your imagination.

Grant said nothing. There seemed to be nothing to say. He was bitterly aware that he had already said too much.

'Can you think of any theory, however wild, that would fit your idea of his being alive?

'I can think of one. He could have been abducted, and the shoe tossed in the river as evidence of drowning.

Bryce regarded him with dramatised respect. 'You mistook your vocation, Grant. You're a very good detective, but as a writer of detective fiction you'd make a fortune.

'I was only answering your challenge and supplying a theory to fit the facts, sir, Grant said mildly. 'I didn't say I believed in it.

This slowed Bryce down a little. 'Take them out of a hat like rabbits, do you. Theories in all sizes to fit any figure! No compulsion to buy! Walk up! Walk up! He stopped and looked for a long moment at Grant's imperturbable face, sat slowly back in his chair, relaxed, and smiled. 'You damned poker-face, you! he said amiably. He searched in his pocket for matches. 'Do you know what I envy about you, Grant? Your self-control. I'm always flying off the handle about something or other; and it doesn't do me or anyone else any good. My wife says that it is because I'm not sure of myself and I'm afraid I'm not going to get my way. She attended a course of six lectures on psychology at Morley College, and there is nothing about the human mind she doesn't know. I can only conclude that you must be damned sure of yourself behind that nice equable temper of yours.

'I don't know, sir, Grant said, amused. 'I was anything but equable when I came in to report, and had nothing to show you but a situation that was exactly the same as it was when you handed it over to me four days ago.

'So you said: "How's the old man's rheumatism today? Is he approachable or do I go on all fours?" His little elephant eyes twinkled for a moment. 'Well, I suppose we present the Commissioner with your neat report of the facts as they exist, and leave him in ignorance of the finer flights of your imagination.

'Oh, yes, sir. I can't very well explain to the Commissioner that I have a feeling in the pit of my stomach.

'No. And if you'll take my advice, you'll stop paying so much attention to the rumblings of your stomach, and stick to what goes on in your head. There is a little phrase commonly used in police work that says, "in accordance with the evidence". You say that over six times a day as a grace before and after meals, and perhaps it will keep your feet on the ground and stop you ending up thinking you're Frederick the Great or a hedgehog or something.

In his schooldays Grant had learned that if he was stumped by a problem it paid to leave it alone for a while. A proposition that had seemed insoluble the night before was simple to the point of being obvious in the light of morning. This was a lesson that he learned for himself and consequently never forgot, and he took it with him both into his personal life and into his work. Whenever he reached deadlock he transferred his attention. So now, although he did not follow Bryce's advice about the daily ritual, he did give heed to his words about ignoring 'the rumblings of his stomach'. Where the Searle affair was concerned he had reached deadlock, so he withdrew his attention and thought upon Tom Thumb. The current Tom Thumb being an 'Arab' potentate who had lived at a Strand hotel for a fortnight, and had disappeared without the formality of paying his bill.

The daily routine, a routine where there was always more work than men to do it, sucked him back into its vortex, and Salcott St Mary disappeared from the forefront of his mind.

Then, on a morning six days later, his mind flung it back at him.

He was walking along the south pavement of the Strand on his way to lunch in Maiden Lane, pleased with the report that he was going to give Bryce when he went back to the Yard, and wondering idly at the large display of women's shoes in a street as unpopular with women as the Strand. The thought of women's shoes reminded him of Dora Siggins and the slippers she had bought for the dance, and he smiled a little to himself as he began to cross the street, remembering her vitality and her chatter and her friendly sharpness. She had nearly left the shoes behind after all, he remembered; even after missing a bus home in order to buy them. They had been lying on the seat because they wouldn't fit into her packed shopping bag, and he had had to point them out to her. An untidy parcel in cheap brown paper, with the heels —

He stopped dead.

A taxi driver, his face contorted with rage and fright, yelled something into his ear. Brakes screamed as a lorry came to a halt at his elbow. A policeman, hearing the yelling brakes and the protests, made slow but purposeful movements in his direction. But Grant did not wait. He flung himself against the next approaching taxi, wrenched the door open, and said 'Scotland Yard and quick' to the driver.

'Exhibitionist! said the driver, and chugged away to the Embankment.

But Grant did not hear him. His mind was busy on the old sucked-dry problem that suddenly seemed so new and exciting now that he had taken it out again. At the Yard he looked for Williams and when he had found him he said: 'Williams, remember saying on the telephone that all your Wickham notes were good for was the wastepaper basket? And I said never to destroy notes.

'I remember, Williams said. 'When I was in town picking up Benny Skoll and you were at Salcott dragging the river.

'You didn't by any chance take my advice, did you?

'Of course I took your advice, sir. I always take your advice.

'You have those notes somewhere?

'I have them right here in my desk.

'May I see them?

'Certainly, sir. Though I don't know if you can read them.

It was certainly not easy. When Williams wrote a report it was in a faultless schoolboy script, but when making notes for his own use he indulged in a hieroglyphic shorthand of his own.

Grant flipped over the pages looking for what he wanted.

""The 9.30 Wickham to Crome", he murmured. "The 10.5 Crome to Wickham. The 10.15 Wickham to Crome." 'M. 'M. "Farm lane: old" — old *what* and child?

'Old labourer and child. I didn't detail what they had in the buses to start with. Just what they picked up on the road.

'Yes, yes; I know; I understand. "Long Leat crossroads." Where is that?

'It's a «green» place, a sort of common, on the outskirts of Wickham, where there's a collection of Fair stuff. A merry-go-round and things.

'I remember. "Two roundabout men, known." Is it "known"?

'Yes; known to the conductor personally from other journeys.

"Woman going to Warren Farm, known." What comes after that, Williams?

Williams translated to him what came after that.

Grant wondered what Williams would think if he flung his arms round him and embraced him, after the fashion of Association Footballers to successful goal shooters.

'May I keep this for the moment? he asked.

He could keep it for good, Williams said. It wasn't likely to be much good now. Unless-unless, of course —

Grant could see the dawning realisation that this sudden interest in his notes must come from more than academic curiosity on Grant's part; but he did not wait to answer the coming question. He went to see Bryce.

'It's my belief, Bryce said, glaring at him, 'that the lower ranks in this institution prolong hotel cases so that they can sit in the back room with the manager and be given drinks on the house.

Grant ignored his libellous pleasantry.

'Is this a routine report before you sit down to a nice leisurely lunch, or have you something to tell me?

'I think I've got something that will please you, sir.

'It will have to be very good to please me today, as perhaps you've noticed.

'I've discovered that he had a passion for cherry brandy.

'*Very* interesting, I must say. *Fascinatingly* interesting! And what good do you think — A wonderful thought suddenly brightened the bleak small eye. He looked at Grant, as one colleague to another. *No* he said. *Not* Hamburg Willy!

'Looks like it, sir. It has all the earmarks; and he'd make a very good Arab with that Jewish profile of his.

'Hamburg! Well, well! What did he get out of it that was worth the risk?

'Soft living for a fortnight; and some fun.

'It's going to be expensive fun. I suppose you've no idea where he can have skipped to?

'Well, I remembered that he has been living with Mabs Hankey, and Mabs is doing a turn at the Acacias in Nice this spring; so I spent most of the morning on the telephone and I find that our Willy, or what I take to be our Willy, is staying there as Monsieur Goujon. What I came to ask, sir, was if, now that it is routine, someone else could take over the extradition and all that and leave me free for a day or two to do something else.

'What do you want to do?

'I've got a new idea about the Searle case.

'Now, Grant! Bryce said, in warning.

'It's too new'-'and too silly, he added to himself-'to talk about, but I would very much like to spend a little time on it and see if it works out, sir.

'Well, I suppose, after the cherry brandy, you think I can't very well refuse you.

'Thank you, sir.

'But if it doesn't look like panning out, I hope you'll drop it. There's plenty of work right here without you running after rainbows and pots of gold.

So Grant walked out of the Superintendent's room in pursuit of his pot of gold, and the first thing he did was to go to his own room and take out the report that the San Francisco police had sent them about Searle. He studied it for a long time, and then sent a polite request to the police of Jobling. Conn.

Then he remembered that he had not yet had lunch. He wanted quiet in which to think, so he put the precious sheet of paper into his wallet and went out to his favourite pub, where the rush would be over and they would manage to scrape up something for him. He still did not know what in that account of Searle's life in America had rung a bell in his mind when he had first read it. But he was beginning to have an idea as to what *kind* of thing it was that had rung that bell.

As he was walking out of the pub after lunch he knew what it might have been.

He went back to the Yard and consulted a reference book.

Yes, it was that.

He took out the San Francisco report and compared it with the entry in the reference book.

He was jubilant.

He had the important thing. The thing he needed to stand on. He had the connection between Searle and Walter Whitmore.

He rang up Marta Hallard, and was told that she was rehearsing for Faint Heart. She would be at the Criterion this afternoon.

Feeling ridiculously like a bubble-so help me, you could bounce me like a ball, he thought-he floated up to Piccadilly Circus. I feel just the way Tommy Thrupp looked last Sunday morning, he thought. Twice as large as life, with lightning shooting out of my head like toasting-forks.

But the Criterion in the throes of a rehearsal afternoon soon reduced him to life-size and brought his feet back on to the ground.

He walked in through the foyer, stepped over the symbolical barrier of a draped cord, and went down the stairs into the earth without interference from anyone. Perhaps they think I look like an author, he thought, and wondered who had written *Faint Heart*. No one ever did know who had written a play. Playwrights must lead blighted lives. Fifty to one, on an actuary's reckoning, against their play running more than three weeks; and then no one even noticed their name on the programme.

And something like a thousand to one against any play ever getting as far as rehearsals even. He wondered whether the author of *Faint Heart* was aware that he was one in a thousand, or whether he was just sure of it.

Somewhere in the bowels of the earth he came on the elegant little box that was the Criterion's auditorium; a little ghostly in the cold light of unshaded electrics, but reticent and well-bred. Various dim shapes lay about in the stalls, and no one made any move to ask his business.

Marta, alone on the stage with a horse-hair sofa and a scared-looking young man, was saying: 'But I *must* lie on the sofa, Bobby darling. It's a waste of my legs if I just sit. Everyone looks the same from the knees down.

'Yes, Marta, you are right, of course, said Bobby, who was the dim figure prowling up and down in front of the orchestra pit.

'I don't want to alter your conception in any way, Bobby, but I do think —

'Yes, Marta dear, you are right, of course, so right. No, of course it won't make any difference. No, I assure you. It really is all right. It'll look grand.

'Of course it may be difficult for Nigel —

'No, Nigel can come round behind you before he says his line. Try it, Nigel, will you.

Marta draped herself over the horse-hair and the scared-looking boy went away and made his entrance. He made his entrance nine times. 'Well, it's coming, Bobby said, letting him away with the ninth.

Someone in the stalls went out and came back with cups of tea.

Nigel said his line above the sofa, to the right of the sofa, to the left of the sofa, and without relation to the sofa at all.

Someone came into the stalls and collected the empty cups.

Grant moved over to a lonely lounger and asked: 'When do you think I shall be able to speak to Miss Hallard?

'No one will be able to speak to her if she has much more of Nigel today.

'I have very important business with her.

'You the clothes man?

Grant said that he was a personal friend of Miss Hallard's and must talk to her for a few moments. He wouldn't keep her longer than

that.

'Oh. The dim figure crawled away and consulted with another. It was like some muffled ritual.

The consulted one detached himself from the group of shadows to which he belonged and came over to Grant. He introduced himself as the stage-manager, and asked what exactly it was that Grant wanted. Grant said that at the very first opportunity would someone tell Miss Hallard that Alan Grant was here and wanted to speak to her for a moment.

This worked; and during the next pause, the stage-manager crept on to the stage and bending apologetically over Marta murmured something in a wood-pigeon undertone.

Marta got up from the couch and came down to the edge of the stage, shading her eyes in an effort to see beyond the lights into the dark auditorium.

'Are you there, Alan? she said. 'Come through the pass door, will you? Show him where it is, someone.

She came to meet him at the pass door and was plainly glad to see him. 'Come and have a cup of tea in the wings with me while the young lovers get on with it. Thank God that I shall never again have to be one of a pair of young lovers! The theatre's most boring convention. You've never come to rehearsal before, Alan! What moved you to it?

'I would like to say that it was intellectual curiosity, but I'm afraid it is just business. You can help me, I think.

She helped him enormously; and never once asked what these questions might mean.

'We haven't had that dinner with your Sergeant Williams, she said as she went away to make the young lovers look like amateurs and wish that they had gone on the land.

'If you wait for a week or so, Sergeant Williams and I may have a story to tell you.

'Splendid. I've earned it, I feel. I've been so good and discreet.

'You've been wonderful, he said, and went away out the back way into the lane with a slight recurrence of the jubilation that had floated him down the stairs at his entrance.

Armed with the information Marta had given him, he went to Cadogan Gardens and interviewed the housekeeper of some furnished flats.

'Oh, yes, I remember, she said. 'They ran about a lot together. Oh, no, she didn't stay here. These are bachelor flats; I mean, flats for one. But she was around a lot.

And by that time London was shutting up shop for the night and there was nothing more he could do until the police of Jobling, Conn., supplied him with the information he had asked for. So he went home early for once, had a light supper, and went to bed. He lay for a long time working it out in his mind. Working out the details. Working out the wherefore.

Toby Tullis had wanted to know what made Leslie Searle tick; and Grant, too, lying with his eyes on the ceiling, unmoving for an hour at a time, was looking for the mainspring of Leslie Searle's mind.

It was forty-eight hours before word came from Jobling, Conn., and half a dozen times in those forty-eight hours Grant was on the brink of going to that woman in Hampstead and dragging the truth from her by main force. But he restrained himself. He would deal with her presently. Her lies would be neatly laid out on a plate, and presented to her when the time came.

He would wait for that report.

And the report when it came proved worth waiting for.

Grant read it through in one swift eye movement, and then he sat back and laughed.

'If any one wants me for the rest of the day, he said to Sergeant Williams, 'I'll be at Somerset House.

'Yes, sir, Williams said, subdued.

Grant glanced at Williams's unwontedly sober features-Williams was a little hurt that Grant was playing a lone hand over this-and was reminded of something.

'By the way, Williams, Miss Hallard is very anxious to meet you. She has asked me if I would bring you to dinner one night.

'Me? said Williams going pink. 'What on earth for?

'She has fallen a victim to your reported charms. She asked me to arrange a night when you were free. I feel in my bones this morning that by Saturday both you and I will be in a state for celebration; and it would be appropriate if we celebrated with Marta, I think. Saturday any good to you?

'Well, Nora and I usually go to the movies on Saturday, but when I'm on duty she goes with Jen. That's her sister. So I don't see why she shouldn't go with Jen this week.

When she hears that you are going to dine with Marta Hallard she'll probably start divorce proceedings.

'Not her. She'll wait up for me so that she can ask me what Marta Hallard was wearing, said Williams, the Benedict.

Grant rang to ask Marta if he could bring Sergeant Williams to meet her on Saturday night, and then went away and buried himself in Somerset House.

And that night he did not lie awake. He was like a child that goes to sleep because that way it will quickly be tomorrow, the one small piece would fall into place and make the pattern whole.

If the one small piece happened not to fit, of course, then the whole picture was wrong. But he was pretty sure that it would fit.

In the short interval between putting out the lamp and falling asleep he ranged sleepily over the 'field'. When that one small piece fell into place tomorrow, life would be a great deal happier for a great many people. For Walter, naturally; Walter would have the shadow of suspicion lifted from him. For Emma Garrowby, with her Liz made safe. For Liz? Relief unspeakable for Liz. And relief for Miss Fitch-who might, he suspected, be a little sad, too. But she could always put it in a book. In a book was where the thing belonged.

Toby would have quite special reasons for self-congratulation, Grant thought; and laughed. And Serge Ratoff would be comforted.

Silas Weekley would not care at all.

He remembered that Marta had remarked on how 'nice' Leslie and Liz had been together. ('A natural pair, she said-but she could never have guessed *how* natural!) Was it just possible that Liz would be hurt when that one small piece fell into place tomorrow? He hoped not. He liked Liz Garrowby. He would like to think that Searle had meant nothing to her. That she would find nothing but happiness and relief in the vindication of her Walter.

What was it Marta had said? 'I don't think Walter knows anything about Liz, and I have an idea that Leslie Searle knew quite a lot. (Surprising, how Marta had seen that without any clue to the source of Searle's understanding.) But it did not matter very much, Grant thought, that Walter did not know very much about Liz. Liz, he was quite sure, knew all that was to be known about Walter; and that was a very good basis for a happy married life.

He fell asleep wondering if being married to someone as nice and intelligent and lovable as Liz Garrowby would compensate a man for the loss of his freedom.

A procession of his loves-romantic devotions most of them-trailed away into the distance as his mind blurred into unconsciousness. But in the morning he had thought for only one woman. That woman in Hampstead.

Never, even at his most callow, had he gone to see any woman with an eagerness as great as the one that was taking him to Holly Pavement this morning. And he was a little shocked as he got off the bus and walked towards the Holly Pavement turning to find that his heart was thumping. It was a very long time indeed since Grant's heart had thumped for any but a purely physical reason.

Damn the woman, he thought, damn the woman.

Holly Pavement was a backwater filled with sunlight; a place so quiet that the strutting pigeons seemed almost rowdy. Number nine was a two-storey house, and the upper storey had been apparently converted into a studio. There were two push-buttons on the bell plaque with neat wooden labels alongside. 'Miss Lee Searle', said the upper one; 'Nat Gansage: Accessories', said the lower.

Wondering what 'accessories' were, Grant pressed the upper button, and presently heard her coming down the wooden stairs to the door. The door opened, and she was standing there.

'Miss Searle? he heard himself say.

'Yes, she said, waiting there in the sunlight, unperturbed but puzzled.

'I am Detective-Inspector Grant of the C.I.D. Her puzzlement deepened at that, he noticed. 'A colleague of mine, Sergeant Williams, came to see you in my stead a week ago because I was otherwise engaged. I would like very much to talk to you myself, if it is convenient

And it had better be convenient, blast you, he said in his mind; furious at his racing heart.

'Yes, of course, she said equably. 'Come in, won't you. I live upstairs.

She shut the door behind him and then led him up the wooden stairs to her studio. A strong smell of coffee-good coffee-pervaded the place and as she led him in she said: I've just been having my breakfast. I have made a bargain with the paper boy that he should leave a roll for me every morning with the paper, and that is my breakfast. But there is lots of coffee. Will you have some, Inspector?

They said at the Yard that Grant had two weaknesses: coffee, and coffee. And it smelt wonderful. But he wasn't going to drink anything with Lee Searle.

'Thank you, but I have just had mine.

She poured another cup for herself, and he noticed that her hand was quite steady. Damn the woman, he was beginning to admire her. As a colleague she would be wonderful.

She was a tall woman, and spare; very good-looking in her bony fashion and still quite young. She wore her hair in a thick plait, coronet-wise. The long housecoat she was wearing was made of some dull green stuff, rather like one Marta had; and she had the long legs that helped to give Marta her elegance.

'Your resemblance to Leslie Searle is remarkable, he said.

'So we have been told, she said shortly.

He moved round the room to look at the Scottish pictures that were still propped up on view. They were orthodox impressions of orthodox scenes, but they were painted with a savage confidence, a fury, so that they shouted at one from the canvas. They didn't present themselves to one, they attacked. 'Look, I'm Suilven! shouted Suilven, looking odder and more individual than even that mountain had ever looked. The Cooling, a grape-blue rampart against a pale morning sky, were a whole barrier of arrogance. Even the calm waters of Kishorn were insolent.

'Did it stay fine for you? Grant asked, and then, feeling that that was too impudent, added: 'The West of Scotland is very wet.

'Not at this time of year. This is the best time.

'Did you find the hotels comfortable? I hear they are apt to be primitive.

'I didn't trouble the hotels. I camped out in my car.

Neat, he thought. Very neat.

'What was it you wanted to talk to me about?

But he was in no hurry. She had caused him a lot of trouble, this woman. He would take his time.

He moved from the pictures to the rows of books on the shelves, and considered the titles.

'You have a liking for oddities, I see.

'Oddities?

'Poltergeists. Showers of fish. Stigmata. That sort of thing.

'I think all artists are attracted by the odd, whatever their medium, don't you?

'You don't seem to have anything on transvestism.

'What made you think of that?

'Then you know the term?

'Of course.

'It is something that doesn't interest you?

'The literature of the subject is very unsatisfactory, I understand. Nothing between learned pamphlets and *News of the World*.

'You ought to write a treatise on the subject.

'I?

'You like oddities, he said smoothly.

'I am a painter, Inspector, not a writer. Besides, no one is interested nowadays in female pirates.

'Pirates?

'They were all pirates or soldiers or sailors, weren't they?

'You think the fashion went out with Phoebe Hessel? Oh, by no means. The thing is continually turning up. Only the other day a woman died in Gloucestershire who had worked for more than twenty years hauling timber and coal, and even the doctor who attended her in her last illness had no idea that she was not a man. I knew a case personally, not long ago. A young man was charged in a London suburb with theft. Quite a normal popular young man. Played a good game of billiards, belonged to a men's club, and was walking out with one of the local beauties. But when medically examined he turned out to be quite a normal young woman. It happens somewhere or other every year or two. Glasgow. Chicago. Dundee. In Dundee a young woman shared a lodging-house ward with ten men and was never questioned. Am I boring you?

'Not at all. I was only wondering whether you considered them oddities in the sense that stigmata and poltergeists are.

'No; oh, no. Some, of course, are genuinely happier in men's things; but a great many do it from love of adventure, and a few from economic necessity. And some because it is the only way in which they can work out their schemes.

She sipped her coffee with polite interest, as one indulging an uninvited guest until he should reach the point of stating what he had come for.

Yes, he thought, she would make a wonderful ally.

His heart had slowed down to its proper rate. These were moves in a game that he had been playing a long time; the game of mind against mind. And now he was interested in her reaction to his moves. She had withstood undermining. How would she stand up to direct attack?

He came away from the bookshelves and said: 'You were very devoted to your cousin, Miss Searle.

'Leslie? But I have already —

'No. Marguerite Merriam.

'Mar — . I don't know what you are talking about.

That was a mistake. If she had stopped to think for a moment, she would have realised that there was no reason at all to deny the connection with Marguerite. But the unexpectedness of that name on his lips had startled her, and she had fallen headlong.

'So devoted that you couldn't think quite straight about her.

'I tell vou -

'No, don't tell me anything. I'll tell you something. Something that ought to make confidences between us quite easy, Miss Searle. I encountered Leslie Searle at a party in Bloomsbury. One of those literary gatherings. He wanted to be introduced to Lavinia Fitch and I agreed to present him. As we pushed through the crowd we were flung together at very close quarters; in fact it was breathing-room only. A policeman is trained to observe, but I think even without that I would have noticed any variation in detail that was presented to me at that range. He had very fine grey eyes, Leslie Searle, and there was a small brown fleck in the iris of the left one. I have lately spent a good deal of time, and a great deal of labour and thought, trying to account for Leslie Searle's disappearance, and with native wit and considerable luck I got to the stage where I needed only one small thing to make my case complete. A small brown fleck. I found it on the doorstep down there.

There was complete silence. She was sitting with her coffee cup in her lap, looking down at it. The slow ticking of a wall clock sounded loud and ponderous in the quiet.

'It's an odd thing, sex, Grant said. 'When you laughed with me, caught in the crush that day, I had a moment of being suddenly out of countenance. Disconcerted. The way a dog is sometimes when it is laughed at. I knew it had nothing to do with your laughing, and I could not think why else I should have been disconcerted. About 12.45 last Monday I began the process of realising why; and was nearly run over by a taxi in consequence.

She had looked up at this; and now she said in a kind of detached interest: 'Are you the star turn at Scotland Yard?

'Oh, no, Grant assured her. 'I come in bundles.

'You don't talk like something out of a bundle. Not any bundles I've been acquainted with. And no one out of a bundle could have could have found out what happened to Leslie Searle.

'Oh, I'm not responsible for that.

'No? — Who is, then?

'Dora Siggins.

'Dora —? Who is she?

'She left her shoes on the seat of my car. Tied up in a neat parcel. At the time they were just Dora Siggins's shoes tied up in a parcel. But at 12.45 last Monday, right in the path of a taxi, they became a parcel of the required dimensions.

'What dimensions?

'The dimensions of that empty space in your photographic box. I did try a pair of Searle's shoes in that space-you must allow me so much-but you'll admit that no run-of-the-mill hard-working one-of-a-bundle detective would think up anything so outre as a parcel containing one pair of women's shoes and a coloured silk head-square. By the way, my sergeant's recorded description of the woman who joined the bus at that cross-roads where the fair is, says: Loose gaberdine raincoat.

'Yes. My burberry is a reversible one.

'Was that part of the preparation too?

'No; I got it years ago, so that I could travel light. I could camp out in it, and go to afternoon tea with the inside out.

'It is a little galling to think that it was I who paved the way for this practical joke of yours by my anxiety to be helpful to the stranger within the gates. I'll let strangers stand after this.

'Is that how it seems to you? she said slowly. 'A practical joke?

'Let us not quibble about terms. I don't know what you call it to yourself. What it actually is, is a practical joke of particular brutality. I take it that your plan was either to make a fool of Walter Whitmore or to leave him in the soup.

'Oh, no, she said simply. 'I was going to kill him.

Her sincerity was so patent that this brought Grant up all standing.

'Kill him? he said, all attention and his flippancy gone.

'It seemed to me that he shouldn't be allowed to go on living, she said. She took her coffee cup off her lap to put it on the table, but her hand was shaking so much that she could not lift it.

Grant moved over and took it from her, gently, and set it down.

'You hated him because of what you imagined he had done to Marguerite Merriam, he said, and she nodded. Her hands were clasped in her lap in a vain effort to keep them steady.

He was silent for a moment or two, trying to get used to the idea that all the ingenuity that he had taken to be her slick exit from a masquerade had been in reality a planned get-out to murder.

'And what made you change your mind?

'Well-oddly enough, the first small thing was something Walter said. It was one evening after Serge Ratoff had made a scene in the pub.

'Yes?

'Walter said that when one was as devoted as Serge was to anyone one ceased to be quite sane about it. That made me think a bit. She paused. 'And then, I liked Liz. She wasn't at all what I had pictured. You see, I had pictured her as the girl who had stolen Walter from Marguerite. And the real Liz wasn't like that at all. That sort-of bewildered me a little. But the real thing that stopped me was-was that-that —

'You found out that the person you loved had never existed, Grant said quietly.

She caught her breath and said: 'I don't know how you could have guessed that.

'But that is what happened, isn't it?

'Yes. Yes, I found out — People didn't know that I had any connection with her, you see, and they talked quite unguardedly. Marta, especially. Marta Hallard. I went back with her one night after dinner. She told me things that-shocked me. I had always known that she was wild and-and headstrong-Marguerite, I mean-but one expects that of genius, and she seeed so-so vulnerable that one forgave

'Yes, I understand.

'But the Marguerite that Marta and those other people knew was someone I didn't know at all. Someone I wouldn't even have liked if — . I remember when I said that at least she *lived*, Marta said: "The trouble was that she didn't allow anyone else to. The suction she created," Marta said, "was so great that her neighbours were left in a vacuum. They either expired from suffocation or they were dashed to death against the nearest large object." So you see, I didn't feel like killing Walter any more. But I still hated him for leaving her. I couldn't forget that. That he had walked out on her and she had killed herself because of it. Oh, I know, I know! she added, as she saw his interruption coming. 'It was not that she loved him so much. I know that now. But if he had stayed with her she would be alive today, alive, with her genius and her beauty and her gay loveliness. He might have waited —

'Till she tired? Grant supplied, more dryly than he had intended, and she winced.

'It wouldn't have been long, she said, with sad honesty.

'May I change my mind and have some of that coffee after all? Grant said.

She looked at her uncontrolled hands and said: 'Will you pour it out?

She watched him as he poured, and said: 'You are a very strange policeman.

'As I said to Liz Garrowby when she made the same remark: It may be your idea of policemen that's strange.

'If I had had a sister like Liz how different my life would have been. I had no one but Marguerite. And when I heard that she had killed herself I suppose I just went a little crazy for a spell. How did you find out about Marguerite and me?

'The police in San Francisco sent us an account of you, and in it your mother's name was given as Mattson. After much too long an interval I remembered that in *Who's Who in the Theatre*, which I had been using one night to pass the time while I waited for a telephone call, Marguerite Merriam's mother was also given as a Mattson. And since I had been looking for some connection between you and Walter, it seemed that I might have found it if you and Marguerite were cousins.

'Yes. We were more. We were both only children. Our mothers were Norwegian, but one married in Britain and one in America. And then, when I was fifteen, my mother took me to England, and I met Marguerite for the first time. She was nearly a year older than me, but she seemed younger. Even then she was brilliant. Everything she did had a-a *shining* quality. We wrote to each other every week from then on, and every year until my parents died we came to England in the summer, and I saw her.

'How old were you when your parents died?

'They died in a flu epidemic when I was seventeen. I sold the pharmacy but kept the photographic side, because I liked it and was good at it. But I wanted to travel. To photograph the world and everything that was beautiful in it. So I took the car and went West. I wore pants in those days just because they were comfortable and cheap, and because when you are five feet ten you don't look your best in girlish things. I hadn't thought of using them as-as camouflage until one day when I was leaning over the engine of the car a man stopped and said: "Got a match, bud?" and I gave him a light; and he looked at me and nodded and said: "Thanks, bud," and went away without a second glance. That made me think. A girl alone is always having trouble-at least in the States she is-even a girl of five feet ten. And a girl has a more difficult time getting an «in» in a racket. So I tried it out for a little. And it worked. It worked like a dream. I began to make money on the Coast. First photographing people who wanted to be movie actors, and then photographing actors themselves. But every year I came to England for a little. As me. My name actually is Leslie, but mostly they called me Lee. She_always called me Lee.

'So your passport is a woman's one.

'Oh, yes. It is only in the States that I am Leslie Searle. And not all the time there.

'And all you did before going to the Westmorland was to hop over to Paris, and lay the track of Leslie Searle in case anyone proved inquisitive.

'Yes. I've been in England for some time. But I didn't actually think I'd need that track. I meant to do away with Leslie Searle too. To find some joint end for Walter and him. So that it would not be apparent that it was murder.

'Whether it was murder or just, as it turned out, leaving Whitmore in the soup, it was a pretty expensive amusement, wasn't it? 'Expensive?

'One very paying photographer's business, one complete gent's outfit in very expensive suitings, and assorted luggage from the best makers. Which reminds me, you didn't steal a glove of Liz Garrowby's, did you?

'No, I stole a pair. Out of the car pocket. I hadn't thought of gloves, but I suddenly realised how convincing women's gloves are. If there is any doubt, I mean, as to your sex. They are almost as good as lipstick. You forgot my lipstick, by the way-in the little parcel. So I took that pair of Liz's. They wouldn't go on, of course, but I meant to carry them. I grabbed them in a hurry out of my collar drawer because Walter was coming along the passage calling to know if I was ready, and later I found that I had only one. Was the other one still there in the drawer?

'It was. With the most misleading results.

'Oh! she said, and looked amused and human for the first time. She thought for a little and then said: 'Walter will never take Liz for granted again. That is one good thing I have done. It is poetic justice that it should have been a woman who did that. It was clever of you to guess that I was a woman just from the outside of a little parcel.

'You do me too much honour. It never even crossed my mind that you might be a woman. I merely thought that Leslie Searle had gone away disguised as a woman. I thought they were probably your things, and that he had gone to you. But the giving up of the whole of Searle's life and belongings puzzled me. He wouldn't do that unless he had another personality to step into. It was only then that I began to wonder whether Searle was masquerading and wasn't a man at all. It didn't seem as wild an idea as it might have, because I had so lately seen that case of arrest for theft that turned out so surprisingly. I had seen how easily it could be done. And then there was you. Staring me in the face, so to speak. A personality all ready for Searle to dissolve into. A personality who had most conveniently been painting in Scotland while Searle was fooling the intelligentsia in Orfordshire. His glance went to the art display. Did you hire these for the occasion, or did you paint them?

'Oh, I painted them. I spend my summers in Europe painting.

'Ever been in Scotland?

'No.

'You must go and see it sometime. It's grand. How did you know that Suilven had that "Look-at-me!" look?

'That is the way it looked on the postcard. Are you Scottish? Grant is a Scottish name, isn't it?

'A renegade Scot. My grandfather belonged to Strathspey. He looked at the serried ranks of canvas evidence and smiled. 'As fine and wholesale and convincing an alibi as ever I saw.

'I don't know, she said, doubtfully, considering them. 'I think to another painter they might be far more of a confession. They're so-arrogantly destructive. And angry. Aren't they. I would paint them all differently today now that I have known Liz, and-grown up, and Marguerite has died in my heart as well as in reality. It is very growing-up to find that someone you loved all your life never existed at all. Are you married, Inspector?

'No. Why?

'I don't know, she said vaguely. 'I just wondered how you understood so quickly about what had happened to me over Marguerite. And I suppose one expects married people to be more sympathetic to emotional vagaries. Which is quite absurd, because they are normally far too cluttered up with their own emotional problems to have spare sympathy. It is the unattached person who-who helps. Won't you have some more coffee?

'You make coffee even better than you paint.

'You haven't come to arrest me, or you wouldn't be drinking my coffee.

'Quite right. I wouldn't. I wouldn't even drink the coffee of a practical joker.

'But you don't mind drinking with a woman who planned long and elaborately to kill someone?

'And changed her mind. There are quite a few people I would willingly have killed in my time. Indeed, with prison no more penitential than a not very good public school, and the death sentence on the point of being abolished, I think I'll make a little list, *a la* Gilbert. Then when I grow a little aged I shall make a total sweep-ten or so for the price of one-and retire comfortably to be well cared-for for the rest of my life.

'You are very kind, she said irrelevantly. 'I haven't really committed any crime, she said presently, 'so they can't prosecute me for anything, can they?

'My dear Miss Searle, you have committed practically every known crime in the book. The worst and most unforgivable being to waste the time of the overworked police forces of this country.

'But that isn't a crime, is it? That is what the police are there for. I don't mean: to have their time wasted, but to make sure that there has been nothing fishy about a happening. There isn't any law that can punish one for what you have called a practical joke, surely?

'There is always "breach of the peace". It is quite wonderful what a variety of things can be induced to come under the heading of breach of the peace.

'And what happens when you breach the peace?

'You are treated to a little homily and fined.

'Fined!

'A quite inappropriate sum, more often than not.

'Then I shan't be sent to prison?

'Not unless you have done something that I don't yet know about. And I wouldn't put it past you, as they say in Strathspey.

'Oh, no, she said. 'No. You really do know all about me. I don't know how you know all you do, if it comes to that.

'Our policemen are wonderful. Hadn't you heard?

'You must have been pretty sure that you knew all about me before you came looking for that brown fleck in my iris.

'Yes. Your policemen are wonderful too. They looked up the births in Jobling, Conn., for me. The infant that Mr and Mrs Durfey Searle took with them when they left Jobling for points south, was, they reported, female. After that I would have been surprised to death if there had been no brown fleck.

'So you ganged up on me. Her hands had stopped shaking, he noticed. He was glad that she had reached the stage of achieving a flippancy. 'Are you going to take me away with you now?

'On the contrary. This is my farewell to you.

'Farewell? You can't have come to take farewell of someone you don't know.

'Where our mutual acquaintance is concerned I, as they say, have the advantage of you. I may be quite new to you-or practically new-but you have been in my hair for the last fourteen days, and I shall be very glad to get you out.

'Then you don't take me to a police station or anything like that?

'No. Not unless you show any signs of beating it out of the country. In which case an officer would no doubt appear at your elbow with a pressing invitation to remain.

'Oh, I'm not going to run away. I am truly sorry for what I have done. I mean, for the trouble-and I suppose the-the misery I have caused.

'Yes. Misery is the appropriate word, I feel.

'I am sorry most of all for what Liz must have suffered.

'It was gratuitously wicked of you to stage that quarrel at the Swan, wasn't it?

'Yes. Yes, it was unforgivable. But he maddened me so. He was so smug. So unconsciously smug. Everything had always been easy for him. She saw the comment in his face, and protested: 'Yes, even Marguerite's death! He went straight from that into Liz's arms. He never really knew desolation. Or fear. Or despair. Or any of the big, *grinding* things in life. He was quite convinced that nothing irretrievable would ever happen to him. If his «Marguerite» died there would always be a «Liz» there. I *wanted* him to suffer. To be caught in something that he couldn't get out of. To meet trouble and for once be stuck with it. And you can't say I wasn't right! He'll never be so smug again. Will he? Will he, then!

'No, I suppose not. Indeed, I'm sure not.

'I'm sorry Liz had to be hurt. I would go to prison if I could undo that. But I've given her a much better Walter than the one she was

going to marry. She really is in love with that poor egotistical wretch of a creature, you know. Well, I've made him over for her. I'll be surprised if he isn't a new man from now on.

If I don't go, you'll be proving to me that you are a public benefactor instead of an offender under breach-of-the-peace.

'What happens to me now? Do I just sit and wait?

'A constable will no doubt serve you solemnly with a summons to appear at a magistrate's court. Have you a lawyer, by the way?

'Yes, I have an old man in a funny little office who keeps my letters till I want them. He's called Bing, Parry, Parry, and Bing, but I don't think he is any of them, actually.

'Then you had better go and see him and tell him what you have done.

'All of it?

'The relevant bits. You can probably leave out the quarrel at the Swan, and anything else that you're particularly ashamed of. She reacted to that, he noticed. 'But don't leave out too much. Lawyers like to know; and they are almost as unshockable as the police.

'Have I shocked you, Inspector?

'Not noticeably. You've been a pleasant change from the armed robberies and the blackmail and the confidence tricks.

'Shall I see you when I am charged?

'No. A lowly sergeant will be there to give evidence, I expect.

He took his hat and prepared to go, looking once more at the one-man show of the West Highlands.

'I really ought to take a picture with me as a souvenir, he said.

'You can have any one you want. They are going to be obliterated anyhow. Which would you like? It was obvious that she did not quite know whether he was serious or not.

'I don't know. I like Kishorn, but I can't remember Kishorn being as aggressive as that. And if I took the Cooling there would be no room for me in the room too.

'But it's only thirty inches by — she was beginning, and then understood. 'Oh. I see. Yes, it is intrusive.

'I don't think I have time to wait and choose. I must leave it, I'm afraid. But thank you for the offer.

'Come back one day when you have more time and choose at your leisure, she said.

'Thank you. I may do that.

'When the court has made an honest woman of me. She went to the stairs with him. 'It's a bit of an anti-climax, isn't it? To set out to kill someone and end with breach of the peace.

The detachment in this caught his attention, and he stood for a long moment looking at her. After a little he said, as one giving judgment: 'You're cured.

'Yes, I'm cured, she said sadly. 'I shall never be green again. It was lovely while it lasted.

'It's nice grown-up, too, Grant said comfortingly, and went away down the stairs. When he opened the door he looked back to find that she was still there watching him. 'By the way, he said, 'what are accessories?

'What? Oh! She laughed a little. 'Belts and bibs and bows and brash little bouquets for women to put in their hair.

'Goodbye, Grant said.

'Goodbye, Detective-Inspector Grant. I am grateful to you.

He went away into the sunlight, at peace with the world.

As he walked down to the bus stop a lovely mad notion came to him. He would ring up Marta and ask her if she wanted another woman for Saturday night, and she would say yes, bring anyone you would like, and he would bring them Lee Searle.

But of course he could not do that. It would be sadly unbecoming in an officer of the Criminal Investigation Department; indicating a lightness of mind, a frivolity, that could only be described as deplorable in the circumstances. It was all very well for the Lee Searles of this world, people who had not yet quite grown up, to indulge their notions, but for adults, and sober adults at that, there were the convenances.

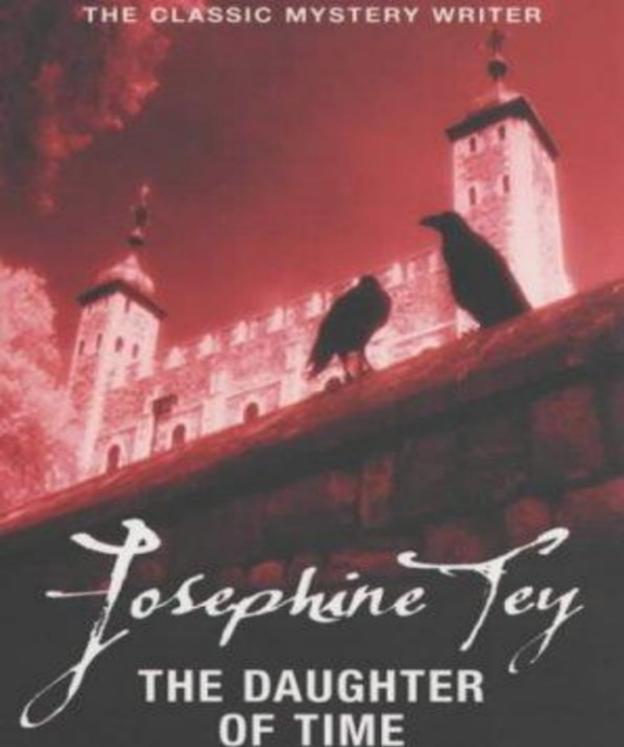
And of course there were compensations. Life was entirely constructed of compensations.

The fantastical was for adolescents; for adults there were adult joys.

And no joy of his 'green' years had ever filled his breast with a more tingling anticipation than the thought of Superintendent Bryce's face when he made his report this morning.

It was a glorious and utterly satisfying prospect.

He could hardly wait.



'Ingenious, stimulating and very enjoyable' Sunday Times

Grant lay on his high white cot and stared at the ceiling. Stared at it with loathing. He knew by heart every last minute crack on its nice clean surface. He had made maps of the ceiling and gone exploring on them; rivers, islands, and continents. He had made guessing games of it and discovered hidden objects; faces, birds, and fishes. He had made mathematical calculations of it and re-discovered his childhood; theorems, angles, triangles. There was practically nothing else he could do but look at it. He hated the sight of it.

He had suggested to The Midget that she might turn his bed round a little so that he could have a new patch of ceiling to explore. But it seemed that that would spoil the symmetry of the room, and in hospitals symmetry ranked just a short head behind cleanliness and a whole length in front of Godliness. Anything out of the parallel was hospital profanity. Why didn't he read? she asked. Why didn't he go on reading some of those expensive brand-new novels that his friends kept on bringing him.

'There are far too many people born into the world, and far too many words written. Millions and millions of them pouring from the presses every minute. It's a horrible thought.'

'You sound constipated,' said The Midget.

The Midget was Nurse Ingham, and she was in sober fact a very nice five-feet two, with everything in just proportion. Grant called her The Midget to compensate himself for being bossed around by a piece of Dresden china which he could pick up in one hand. When he was on his feet, that is to say. It was not only that she told him what he might or might not do, but she dealt with his six-feet-odd with an off-hand ease that Grant found humiliating. Weights meant nothing, apparently, to The Midget. She tossed mattresses around with the absent-minded grace of a plate spinner. When she was off-duty he was attended to by The Amazon, a goddess with arms like the limb of a beech tree. The Amazon was Nurse Darroll, who came from Gloucestershire and was homesick each daffodil season. (The Midget came from Lytham St Anne's, and there was no daffodil nonsense about her.) She had large soft hands and large soft cow's eyes and she always looked very sorry for you, but the slightest physical exertion set her breathing like a suction-pump. On the whole Grant found it even more humiliating to be treated as a dead weight than to be treated as if he was no weight at all.

Grant was bed-borne, and a charge on The Midget and The Amazon, because he had fallen through a trap-door. This, of course, was the absolute in humiliation; compared with which the heavings of The Amazon and the light slingings of The Midget were a mere corollary. To fall through a trap-door was the ultimate in absurdity; pantomimic, bathetic, grotesque. At the moment of his disappearance from the normal level of perambulation he had been in hot pursuit of Benny Skoll, and the fact that Benny had careered round the next corner slap into the arms of Sergeant Williams provided the one small crumb of comfort in an intolerable situation.

Benny was now 'away' for three years, which was very satisfactory for the lieges, but Benny would get time off for good behaviour. In hospitals there was no time off for good behaviour.

Grant stopped staring at the ceiling, and slid his eyes sideways at the pile of books on his bedside table; the gay expensive pile that The Midget had been urging on his attention. The top one, with the pretty picture of Valetta in unlikely pink, was Lavinia Fitch's annual account of a blameless heroine's tribulations. In view of the representation of the Grand Harbour on the cover, the present Valerie or Angela or Cecile or Denise must be a naval wife. He had opened the book only to read the kind message that Lavinia had written inside.

The Sweat and the Furrow was Silas Weekley being earthy and spade-conscious all over seven hundred pages. The situation, to judge from the first paragraph, had not materially changed since Silas's last book: mother lying-in with her eleventh upstairs, father laid-out after his ninth downstairs, eldest son lying to the Government in the cow-shed, eldest daughter lying with her lover in the hay-loft, everyone else lying low in the barn. The rain dripped from the thatch, and the manure steamed in the midden. Silas never omitted the manure. It was not Silas's fault that its steam provided the only uprising element in the picture. If Silas could have discovered a brand of steam that steamed downwards, Silas would have introduced it.

Under the harsh shadows and highlights of Silas's jacket was an elegant affair of Edwardian curlicues and Baroque nonsense, entitled *Bells on Her Toes*. Which was Rupert Rouge being arch about vice. Rupert Rouge always seduced you into laughter for the first three pages. About Page Three you noticed that Rupert had learned from that very arch (but of course not vicious) creature George Bernard Shaw that the easiest way to sound witty was to use that cheap and convenient method, the paradox. After that you could see the jokes coming three sentences away.

The thing with a red gun-flash across a night-green cover was Oscar Oakley's latest. Toughs talking out of the corners of their mouths in synthetic American that had neither the wit nor the pungency of the real thing. Blondes, chromium bars, breakneck chases. Very remarkable bunk.

The Case of the Missing Tin-opener, by John James Mark, had three errors of procedure in the first two pages, and had at least provided Grant with a pleasant five minutes while he composed an imaginary letter to its author.

He could not remember what the thin blue book at the bottom of the pile was. Something earnest and statistical, he thought. Tsetse flies, or calories, or sex behaviour, or something.

Even in that, you knew what to expect on the next page. Did no one, any more, no one in all this wide world, change their record now and then? Was everyone nowadays thrilled to a formula? Authors today wrote so much to a pattern that

their public expected it. The public talked about 'a new Silas Weekley' or 'a new Lavinia Fitch' exactly as they talked about 'a new brick' or 'a new hairbrush'. They never said 'a new book by' whoever it might be. Their interest was not in the book but in its newness. They knew quite well what the book would be like.

It might be a good thing, Grant thought as he turned his nauseated gaze away from the motley pile, if all the presses of the world were stopped for a generation. There ought to be a literary moratorium. Some Superman ought to invent a ray that would stop them all simultaneously. Then people wouldn't send you a lot of fool nonsense when you were flat on your back, and bossy bits of Meissen wouldn't expect you to read them.

He heard the door open, but did not stir himself to look. He had turned his face to the wall, literally and metaphorically.

He heard someone come across to his bed, and closed his eyes against possible conversation. He wanted neither Gloucestershire sympathy nor Lancashire briskness just now. In the succeeding pause a faint enticement, a nostalgic breath of all the fields of Grasse, teased his nostrils and swam about his brain. He savoured it and considered. The Midget smelt of lavender dusting powder, and The Amazon of soap and iodoform. What was floating expensively about his nostrils was *L'Enclos Numéro Cinq*. Only one person of his acquaintance used L'Enclos Number Five. Marta Hallard.

He opened an eye and squinted up at her. She had evidently bent over to see if he was asleep, and was now standing in an irresolute way – if anything Marta did could be said to be irresolute – with her attention on the heap of all too obviously virgin publications on the table. In one arm she was carrying two new books, and in the other a great sheaf of white lilac. He wondered whether she had chosen white lilac because it was her idea of the proper floral offering for winter (it adorned her dressing-room at the theatre from December to March), or whether she had taken it because it would not detract from her black-and-white chic. She was wearing a new hat and her usual pearls; the pearls which he had once been the means of recovering for her. She looked very handsome, very Parisian, and blessedly unhospital-like.

'Did I waken you, Alan?'

'No. I wasn't asleep.'

'I seem to be bringing the proverbial coals,' she said, dropping the two books alongside their despised brethren. 'I hope you will find these more interesting than you seem to have found that lot. Didn't you even try a little teensy taste of our Lavinia?'

'I can't read anything.'

'Are you in pain?'

'Agony. But it's neither my leg nor my back.'

'What then?'

'It's what my cousin Laura calls "the prickles of boredom".'

'Poor Alan. And how right your Laura is.' She picked a bunch of narcissi out of a glass that was much too large for them, dropped them with one of her best gestures into the washbasin, and proceeded to substitute the lilac. 'One would expect boredom to be a great yawning emotion, but it isn't, of course. It's a small niggling thing.'

'Small nothing. Niggling nothing. It's like being beaten with nettles.'

'Why don't you take up something?'

'Improve the shining hour?'

'Improve your mind. To say nothing of your soul and your temper. You might study one of the philosophies. Yoga, or something like that. But I suppose an analytical mind is not the best kind to bring to the consideration of the abstract.'

'I did think of going back to algebra. I have an idea that I never did algebra justice, at school. But I've done so much geometry on that damned ceiling that I'm a little off mathematics.'

'Well, I suppose it is no use suggesting jigsaws to someone in your position. How about cross-words? I could get you a book of them, if you like.'

'God forbid.

'You could invent them, of course. I have heard that that is more fun than solving them.'

'Perhaps. But a dictionary weighs several pounds. Besides, I always did hate looking up something in a reference book.'

'Do you play chess? I don't remember. How about chess problems? White to play and mate in three moves, or something like that.'

'My only interest in chess is pictorial.'

'Pictorially?'

'Very decorative things, knights and pawns and what-not. Very elegant.'

'Charming. I *could* bring you along a set to play with. All right, no chess. You could do some academic investigating. That's a sort of mathematics. Finding a solution to an unsolved problem.'

'Crime, you mean? I know all the case-histories by heart. And there is nothing more that can be done about any of them. Certainly not by someone who is flat on his back.'

'I didn't mean something out of the files at the Yard. I meant something more – what's the word? something classic. Something that has puzzled the world for ages.'

'As what, for instance?'

'Say, the casket letters.'

'Oh, not Mary Queen of Scots!'

'Why not?' asked Marta, who like all actresses saw Mary Stuart through a haze of white veils. 'I could be interested in a bad woman but never in a silly one.'

'Silly?' said Marta in her best lower-register Electra voice.

'Very silly.'

'Oh, Alan, how can you!'

'If she had worn another kind of headdress no one would ever have bothered about her. It's that cap that seduces people.'

'You think she would have loved less greatly in a sun-bonnet?'

'She never loved greatly at all, in any kind of bonnet.'

Marta looked as scandalised as a lifetime in the theatre and an hour of careful make-up allowed her to.

'Why do you think that?'

'Mary Stuart was six feet tall. Nearly all outsize women are cold. Ask any doctor.'

And as he said it he wondered why, in all the years since Marta had first adopted him as a spare escort when she needed one, it had not occurred to him to wonder whether her notorious level-headedness about men had something to do with her inches. But Marta had not drawn any parallels; her mind was still on her favourite Queen.

'At least she was a martyr. You'll have to allow her that.'

'Martyr to what?'

'Her religion.'

'The only thing she was a martyr to was rheumatism. She married Darnley without the Pope's dispensation, and Bothwell by Protestant rites.'

'In a moment you'll be telling me she wasn't a prisoner!'

'The trouble with you is that you think of her in a little room at the top of a castle, with bars on the window and a faithful old attendant to share her prayers with her. In actual fact she had a personal household of sixty persons. She complained bitterly when it was reduced to a beggarly thirty, and nearly died of chagrin when it was reduced to two male secretaries, several women, an embroiderer, and a cook or two. And Elizabeth had to pay for all that out of her own purse. For twenty years she paid, and for twenty years Mary Stuart hawked the crown of Scotland round Europe to anyone who would start a revolution and put her back on the throne that she had lost; or, alternatively, on the one Elizabeth was sitting on.'

He looked at Marta and found that she was smiling.

'Are they a little better now?' she asked. 'Are what better?'

'The prickles.'

He laughed.

'Yes. For a whole minute I had forgotten about them. That is at least one good thing to be put down to Mary Stuart's account!'

'How do you know so much about Mary?'

'I did an essay about her in my last year at school.'

'And didn't like her. I take it.'

'Didn't like what I found out about her.'

'You don't think her tragic, then.'

'Oh, yes, very. But not tragic in any of the ways that popular belief makes her tragic. Her tragedy was that she was born a Queen with the outlook of a suburban housewife. Scoring off Mrs Tudor in the next street is harmless and amusing; it may lead you into unwarrantable indulgence in hire-purchase, but it affects only yourself. When you use the same technique on kingdoms the result is disastrous. If you are willing to put a country of ten million people in pawn in order to score off a royal rival, then you end by being a friendless failure.' He lay thinking about it for a little. 'She would have been a wild success as a mistress at a girls' school.'

'Beast!

'I meant it nicely. The staff would have liked her, and all the little girls would have adored her. That is what I meant about her being tragic.'

'Ah well. No casket letters, it seems. What else is there? The Man In The Iron Mask.'

'I can't remember who that was, but I couldn't be interested in anyone who was being coy behind some tinplate. I couldn't be interested in anyone at all unless I could see his face.'

'Ah, yes. I forgot your passion for faces. The Borgias had wonderful faces. I should think they would provide a little mystery or two for you to dabble in if you looked them up. Or there was Perkin Warbeck, of course. Imposture is always fascinating. Was he or wasn't he. A lovely game. The balance can never come down wholly on one side or the other. You push it over and up it comes again, like one of those weighted toys.'

The door opened and Mrs Tinker's homely face appeared in the aperture surmounted by her still more homely and historic hat. Mrs Tinker had worn the same hat since first she began to 'do' for Grant, and he could not imagine her in any other. That she did possess another one he knew, because it went with something that she referred to as 'me blue'. Her

'blue' was an occasional affair, in both senses, and never appeared at 19 Tenby Court. It was worn with a ritualistic awareness, and having been worn it was used in the event as a yardstick by which to judge the proceedings. ('Did you enjoy it, Tink? What was it like?' 'Not worth putting on me blue for.') She had worn it to Princess Elizabeth's wedding, and to various other royal functions, and had indeed figured in it for two flashing seconds in a newsreel shot of the Duchess of Kent cutting a ribbon, but to Grant it was a mere report; a criterion of the social worth of an occasion. A thing was or was not worth putting on 'me blue' for.

'I 'eard you 'ad a visitor,' said Mrs Tinker, 'and I was all set to go away again when I thought the voice sounded familiar like, and I says to meself: "It's only Miss Hallard," I says, so I come in.'

She was carrying various paper bags and a small tight bunch of anemones. She greeted Marta as woman to woman, having been in her time a dresser and having therefore no exaggerated reverence for the goddesses of the theatre world, and looked askance at the beautiful arrangement of lilac sprays that had blossomed under Marta's ministrations. Marta did not see the glance but she saw the little bunch of anemones and took over the situation as if it were something already rehearsed.

'I squander my vagabond's hire on white lilac for you, and then Mrs Tinker puts my nose out of joint by bringing you the Lilies Of The Field.'

'Lilies?' said Mrs Tinker, doubtfully.

'Those are the Solomon in all his glory things. The ones that toiled not neither did they spin.'

Mrs Tinker went to church only for weddings and christenings, but she belonged to a generation that had been sent to Sunday school. She looked with a new interest at the little handful of glory incased by her woollen glove.

'Well, now. I never knew that. Makes more sense that way, don't it. I always pictured them arums. Fields and fields of arums. Awful expensive, you know, but a bit depressing. So they was coloured? Well, why can't they say so? What do they have to call them lilies for!

And they went on to talk about translation, and how misleading Holy Writ could be ('I always wondered what bread on the waters was', Mrs Tinker said) and the awkward moment was over.

While they were still busy with the Bible, The Midget came in with extra flower vases. Grant noticed that the vases were designed to hold white lilac and not anemones. They were tribute to Marta; a passport to further communing. But Marta never bothered about women unless she had an immediate use for them; her tact with Mrs Tinker had been mere savoir faire; a conditioned reflex. So The Midget was reduced to being functional instead of social. She collected the discarded narcissi from the washbasin and meekly put them back into a vase. The Midget being meek was the most beautiful sight that had gladdened Grant's eyes for a long time.

'Well,' Marta said, having finished her arrangement of the lilac and placed the result where he could see it, 'I shall leave Mrs Tinker to feed you all the titbits out of those paper bags. It couldn't be, could it, Mrs Tinker darling, that one of those bags contains any of your wonderful bachelor's buttons?'

Mrs Tinker glowed.

'You'd like one or two maybe? Fresh outa me oven?'

'Well, of course I shall have to do penance for it afterwards those little rich cakes are death on the waist but just give me a couple to put in my bag for my tea at the theatre.'

She chose two with a flattering deliberation ('I like them a little brown at the edges'), dropped them into her handbag, and said: 'Well, au revoir, Alan. I shall look in, in a day or two, and start you on a sock. There is nothing so soothing, I understand, as knitting. Isn't that so, nurse?'

'Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. A lot of my gentlemen patients take to knitting. They find it whiles away the time very nicely.' Marta blew him a kiss from the door and was gone, followed by the respectful Midget.

'I'd be surprised if that hussy is any better than she ought to be,' Mrs Tinker said, beginning to open the paper bags. She was not referring to Marta.

But when Marta came back two days later it was not with knitting needles and wool. She breezed in, very dashing in a Cossack hat worn at a casual rake that must have taken her several minutes at her mirror, just after lunch.

'I haven't come to stay, my dear. I'm on my way to the theatre. It's matinée day, God help me. Tea trays and morons. And we've all got to the frightful stage when the lines have ceased to have any meaning at all for us. I don't think this play is ever coming off. It's going to be like those New York ones that run by the decade instead of by the year. It's too frightening. One's mind just won't stay on the thing. Geoffrey dried up in the middle of the second act last night. His eyes nearly popped out of his head. I thought for a moment he was having a stroke. He said afterwards that he had no recollection of anything that happened between his entrance and the point where he came to and found himself half-way through the act.'

'A black-out, you mean?'

'No. Oh, no. Just being an automaton. Saying the lines and doing the business and thinking of something else all the time.'

'If all reports are true that's no unusual matter where actors are concerned.'

'Oh, in moderation, no. Johnny Garson can tell you how much paper there is in the house while he is sobbing his heart out on someone's lap. But that's different from being "away" for half an act. Do you realise that Geoffrey had turned his son out of the house, quarrelled with his mistress, and accused his wife of having an affaire with his best friend all without being aware of it?'

'What was he aware of?'

'He says he had decided to lease his Park Lane flat to Dolly Dacre and buy that Charles The Second house at Richmond that the Latimers are giving up because he has got that Governor's appointment. He had thought about the lack of bathrooms and decided that the little upstairs room with the eighteenth-century Chinese paper would make a very good one. They could remove the beautiful paper and use it to decorate that dull little room downstairs at the back. It's full of Victorian panelling, the dull little room. He had also reviewed the drainage, wondered if he had enough money to take the old tiling off and replace it, and speculated as to what kind of cooking range they had in the kitchen. He had just decided to get rid of the shrubbery at the gate when he found himself face to face with me, on a stage, in the presence of nine hundred and eighty-seven people, in the middle of a speech. Do you wonder that his eyes popped. I see that you have managed to read at least one of the books I brought you if the rumpled jacket is any criterion.'

'Yes. The mountain one. It was a godsend. I lay for hours looking at the pictures. Nothing puts things in perspective as quickly as a mountain.'

'The stars are better. I find.'

'Oh, no. The stars merely reduce one to the status of an amoeba. The stars take the last vestige of human pride, the last spark of confidence, from one. But a snow mountain is a nice human-size yard-stick. I lay and looked at Everest and thanked God that I wasn't climbing those slopes. A hospital bed was a haven of warmth and rest and security by comparison, and The Midget and The Amazon two of the highest achievements of civilisation.'

'Ah, well, here are some more pictures for you.'

Marta up-ended the quarto envelope she was carrying, and spilled a collection of paper sheets over his chest.

'What is this?'

'Faces,' said Marta, delightedly. 'Dozens of faces for you. Men, women, and children. All sorts, conditions, and sizes.'

He picked a sheet off his chest and looked at it. It was an engraving of a fifteenth-century portrait. A woman.

'Who is this?'

'Lucrezia Borgia. Isn't she a duck.'

'Perhaps, but are you suggesting that there was any mystery about her?'

'Oh, yes. No one has ever decided whether she was her brother's tool or his accomplice.'

He discarded Lucrezia, and picked up a second sheet. This proved to be the portrait of a small boy in late-eighteenth-century clothes, and under it in faint capitals was printed the words: Louis XVII.

'Now there's a beautiful mystery for you,' Marta said. 'The Dauphin. Did he escape or did he die in captivity?'

'Where did you get all these?'

'I routed James out of his cubby-hole at the Victoria and Albert, and made him take me to a print shop. I knew he would know about that sort of thing, and I'm sure he has nothing to interest him at the V. and A.'

It was so like Marta to take it for granted that a Civil Servant, because he happened also to be a playwright and an authority on portraits, should be willing to leave his work and delve about in print shops for her pleasure.

He turned up the photograph of an Elizabethan portrait. A man in velvet and pearls. He turned the back to see who this might be and found that it was the Earl of Leicester.

'So that is Elizabeth's Robin,' he said. 'I don't think I ever saw a portrait of him before.'

Marta looked down on the virile fleshy face and said: 'It occurs to me for the first time that one of the major tragedies of history is that the best painters didn't paint you till you were past your best. Robin must have been quite a man. They say Henry the Eighth was dazzling as a young man, but what is he now? Something on a playing card. Nowadays, we know what Tennyson was like before he grew that frightful beard. I must fly. I'm late as it is. I've been lunching at the Blague, and so many people came up to talk that I couldn't get away as early as I meant to.'

'I hope your host was impressed,' Grant said, with a glance at the hat.

'Oh, ves, She knows about hats. She took one look and said "Jacques Tous, I take it".'

'She!' said Grant surprised.

'Yes. Madeleine March. And it was I who was giving her luncheon. Don't look so astonished: it isn't tactful. I'm hoping, if you must know, that she'll write me that play about Lady Blessington. But there was such a to-ing and fro-ing that I had no chance to make any impression on her. However, I gave her a wonderful meal. Which reminds me that Tony Bittmaker was entertaining a party of seven. Magnums galore. How do you imagine he keeps going?'

'Lack of evidence,' Grant said, and she laughed and went away.

In the silence he went back to considering Elizabeth's Robin. What mystery was there about Robin?

Oh, yes. Amy Robsart, of course.

Well, he wasn't interested in Amy Robsart. He didn't care how she had fallen down stairs, or why.

But he spent a very happy afternoon with the rest of the faces. Long before he had entered the Force he had taken a delight in faces, and in his years at the Yard that interest had proved both a private entertainment and a professional advantage. He had once in his early days dropped in with his Superintendent at an identification parade. It was not his case, and they were both there on other business, but they lingered in the background and watched while a man and a woman, separately, walked down the line of twelve nondescript men, looking for the one they hoped to recognise.

'Which is Chummy, do you know?' the Super had whispered to him.

'I don't know,' Grant had said, 'but I can guess.'

'You can? Which do you make it?'

'The third from the left.'

'What is the charge?'

'I don't know. Don't know anything about it.'

His chief had cast him an amused glance. But when both the man and the woman had failed to identify anyone and had gone away, and the line broke into a chattering group, hitching collars and settling ties preparatory to going back to the street and the world of everyday from which they had been summoned to assist the Law, the one who did not move was the third man from the left. The third man from the left waited submissively for his escort and was led away to his cell again.

'Strewth!' the Superintendent had said. 'One chance out of twelve, and you made it. That was good going. He picked your man out of the bunch,' he said in explanation to the local Inspector.

'Did you know him?' the Inspector said, a little surprised. 'He's never been in trouble before, as far as we know.'

'No, I never saw him before. I don't even know what the charge is.'

'Then what made you pick him?'

Grant had hesitated, analysing for the first time his process of selection. It had not been a matter of reasoning. He had not said: 'That man's face has this characteristic or that characteristic, therefore he is the accused person.' His choice had been almost instinctive; the reason was in his subconscious. At last, having delved into his subconscious, he blurted: 'He was the only one of the twelve with no lines on his face.'

They had laughed at that. But Grant, once he had pulled the thing into the light, saw how his instinct had worked and recognised the reasoning behind it. 'It sounds silly, but it isn't,' he had said. 'The only adult entirely without face lines is the idiot.'

'Freeman's no idiot, take it from me,' the Inspector broke in. 'A very wide-awake wide boy he is, believe me.'

'I didn't mean that. I mean that the idiot is irresponsible. The idiot is the standard of irresponsibility. All those twelve men in that parade were thirty-ish, but only one had an irresponsible face. So I picked him at once.'

After that it had become a mild joke at the Yard that Grant could 'pick them at sight'. And the Assistant Commissioner had once said teasingly: 'Don't tell me that you believe that there is such a thing as a criminal face, Inspector.'

But Grant had said no, he wasn't as simple as that. 'If there was only one kind of crime, sir, it might be possible; but crimes being as wide as human nature, if a policeman started to put faces into categories he would be sunk. You can tell what the normal run of disreputable women look like by a walk down Bond Street any day between five and six, and yet the most notorious woman in London looks like a cold saint.'

'Not so saintly of late; she's drinking too much these days,' the A.C. had said, identifying the lady without difficulty; and the conversation had gone on to other things.

But Grant's interest in faces had remained and enlarged until it became a conscious study. A matter of case records and comparisons. It was, as he had said, not possible to put faces into any kind of category, but it was possible to characterise individual faces. In a reprint of a famous trial, for instance, where photographs of the principal actors in the case were displayed for the public's interest, there was never any doubt as to which was the accused and which the judge.

Occasionally, one of the counsel might on looks have changed places with the prisoner in the dock – counsel were after all a mere cross-section of humanity, as liable to passion and greed as the rest of the world, but a judge had a special quality; an integrity and a detachment. So, even without a wig, one did not confuse him with the man in the dock, who had had neither integrity nor detachment.

Maria's James, having been dragged from his 'cubby-hole', had evidently enjoyed himself, and a fine selection of offenders, or their victims. kept Grant entertained until The Midget brought his tea. As he tidied the sheets together to put them away in his locker his hand came in contact with one that had slipped off his chest and had lain all the afternoon unnoticed on the counterpane. He picked it up and looked at it.

It was the portrait of a man dressed in the velvet cap and slashed doublet of the late fifteenth century. A man about thirty-five or thirty-six years old, lean and clean shaven. He wore a rich jewelled collar, and was in the act of putting a ring on the little finger of his right hand. But he was not looking at the ring. He was looking off into space.

Of all the portraits Grant had seen this afternoon this was the most individual. It was as if the artist had striven to put on canvas something that his talent was not sufficient to translate into paint. The expression in the eyes – that most arresting and individual expression – had defeated him. So had the mouth: he had not known how to make lips so thin and so wide look mobile, so the mouth was wooden and a failure. What he had best succeeded in was in the bone structure of the face: the strong cheekbones, the hollows below them, the chin too large for strength.

Grant paused in the act of turning the thing over, to consider the face a moment longer. A judge? A soldier? A prince? Someone used to great responsibility, and responsible in his authority. Someone too-conscientious. A worrier; perhaps a perfectionist. A man at ease in a large design, but anxious over details. A candidate for gastric ulcer. Someone, too, who had suffered ill-health as a child. He had that incommunicable, that indescribable look that childhood suffering leaves behind it; less positive than the look on a cripple's face, but as inescapable. This the artist had both understood and translated into terms of paint. The slight fullness of the lower eyelid, like a child that has slept too heavily; the texture of the skin; the old-man look in a young face.

He turned the portrait over to look for a caption. On the back was printed: Richard the Third. From the portrait in the National Portrait Gallery. Artist Unknown. Richard the Third.

So that was who it was. Richard the Third. Crouchback. The monster of nursery stories. The destroyer of innocence. A synonym for villainy. He turned the paper over and looked again. Was that what the artist had tried to convey when he had painted those eyes? Had what he had seen in those eyes been the look of a man haunted? He lay a long time looking at that face; at those extraordinary eyes. They were long eyes, set close under the brows; the brows slightly drawn in that worried, over-conscientious frown. At first glance they appeared to be peering; but as one looked one found that they were in fact withdrawn, almost absent-minded. When The Midget came back for his tray he was still staring at the portrait. Nothing like this had come his way for years. It made La Giaconda look like a poster.

The Midget examined his virgin teacup, put a practised hand against the teapot's tepid cheek, and pouted. She had better things to do, she conveyed, than bring him trays for him to ignore. He pushed the portrait at her. What did she think of it? If that man were her patient what would be her verdict? 'Liver,' she said crisply and bore away the tray in heel-tapping protest, all starch and blonde curls.

But the surgeon, strolling in against her draught, kindly and casual, had other views. He looked at the portrait, as invited, and said after a moment's interested scrutiny: 'Poliomyelitis.'

'Infantile paralysis?' Grant said; and remembered all of a sudden that Richard III had a withered arm. 'Who is it?' the surgeon asked.

'Richard the Third.'

'Really? That's interesting.'

'Did you know that he had a withered arm?'

'Had he? I didn't remember that. I thought he was a hunchback.'

'So he was.'

'What I do remember is that he was born with a full set of teeth and ate live frogs. Well, my diagnosis seems to be abnormally accurate.'

'Uncanny. What made you choose polio?'

'I don't quite know, now that you ask me to be definitive, just the look of the face, I suppose. It's the look one sees on the face of a crippled child. If he was born hunchbacked that probably accounts for it and not polio. I notice the artist has left out the hump.'

'Yes. Court painters have to have a modicum of tact. It wasn't until Cromwell that sitters asked for "warts and all"."

'If you ask me,' the surgeon said, absentmindedly considering the splint on Grant's leg, 'Cromwell started that inverted snobbery from which we are all suffering today. "I'm a plain man, I am; no nonsense about me." And no manners, grace, or generosity, either.' He pinched Grant's toe with detached interest. 'It's a raging disease. A horrible perversion. In some parts of the States, I understand, it's as much as a man's political life is worth to go to some constituencies with his tie tied and his coat on. That's being stuffed-shirt. The beau ideal is to be one of the boys. That's looking very healthy,' he added, referring to Grant's big toe, and came back of his own accord to the portrait lying on the counterpane.

'Interesting,' he said, 'that about the polio. Perhaps it really was polio, and that accounts for the shrunken arm.' He went on considering it, making no movement to go. 'Interesting, anyhow. Portrait of a murderer. Does he run to type, would you say?'

'There isn't a murder type. People murder for too many different reasons. But I can't remember any murderer, either in my own experience, or in case-histories, who resembled him.'

'Of course he was hors concours in his class, wasn't he. He couldn't have known the meaning of scruple.'

'No.'

'I once saw Olivier play him. The most dazzling exhibition of sheer evil, it was. Always on the verge of toppling over into the grotesque, and never doing it.'

'When I showed you the portrait,' Grant said, 'before you knew who it was, did you think of villainy?'

'No,' said the surgeon, 'no, I thought of illness.'

'It's odd, isn't it. I didn't think of villainy either. And now that I know who it is, now that I've read the name on the back, I can't think of it as anything but villainous.'

'I suppose villainy, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Well, I'll look in again towards the end of the week. No pain to speak of now?'

And he went away, kindly and casual as he had come.

It was only after he had given the portrait further puzzled consideration (it piqued him to have mistaken one of the most notorious murderers of all time for a judge; to have transferred a subject from the dock to the bench was a shocking piece of ineptitude) that it occurred to Grant that the portrait had been provided as the illustration to a piece of detection.

What mystery was there about Richard III?

And then he remembered. Richard had murdered his two boy nephews, but no one knew how. They had merely disappeared. They had disappeared, if he remembered rightly, while Richard was away from London. Richard had sent someone to do the deed. But the mystery of the children's actual fate had never been solved. Two skeletons had turned up – under some stairs? – in Charles II's day, and had been buried. It was taken for granted that the skeletons were the remains of the young princes, but nothing had ever been proved.

It was shocking how little history remained with one after a good education. All he knew about Richard III was that he was the younger brother of Edward IV. That Edward was a blond six-footer with remarkable good looks and a still more remarkable way with women; and that Richard was a hunchback who usurped the throne on his brother's death in place of the boy heir, and arranged the death of that heir and his small brother to save himself any further trouble. He also knew that Richard had died at the battle of Bosworth yelling for a horse, and that he was the last of his line. The last Plantagenet.

Every schoolboy turned over the final page of Richard III with relief, because now at last the Wars of the Roses were over and they could get on to the Tudors, who were dull but easy to follow.

When The Midget came to tidy him up for the night Grant said: 'You don't happen to have a history book, by any chance, do you?'

'A history book? No. What would I be doing with a history book.' It was not a question, so Grant did not try to provide an answer. His silence seemed to fret her.

'If you really want a history book,' she said presently, 'you could ask Nurse Darroll when she brings your supper. She has all her schoolbooks on a shelf in her room and it's quite possible she has a history among them.'

How like The Amazon to keep her schoolbooks! he thought. She was still homesick for school as she was homesick for Gloucestershire every time the daffodils bloomed. When she lumbered into the room, bearing his cheese pudding and

stewed rhubarb, he looked at her with a tolerance that bordered on the benevolent. She ceased to be a large female who breathed like a suction-pump and became a potential dispenser of delight.

Oh yes, she had a history book, she said. Indeed, she rather thought that she had two. She had kept all her schoolbooks because she had loved school.

It was on the tip of Grant's tongue to ask her if she had kept her dolls, but he stopped himself in time.

'And of course I loved history,' she said. 'It was my favourite subject. Richard the Lionheart was my hero.'

'An intolerable bounder,' Grant said.

'Oh, no!' she said, looking wounded.

'A hyperthyroid type,' Grant said pitilessly. 'Rocketing to and fro about the earth like a badly made firework. Are you going off duty now?'

'Whenever I've finished my trays.'

'Could you find that book for me tonight?'

'You're supposed to be going to sleep, not staying awake over history books.'

'I might as well read some history as look at the ceiling which is the alternative. Will you get it for me?'

'I don't think I could go all the way up to the Nurses' Block and back again tonight for someone who is rude about the Lionheart.'

'All right,' he said. 'I'm not the stuff that martyrs are made of. As far as I'm concerned Coeur-de-Lion is the pattern of chivalry, the *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*, a faultless commander and a triple D.S.O. Now will you get the book?'

'It seems to me you've sore need to read a little history,' she said, smoothing a mitred sheet-corner with a large admiring hand, 'so I'll bring you the book when I come past. I'm going out to the pictures anyhow.'

It was nearly an hour before she reappeared, immense in a camel-hair coat. The room lights had been put out and she materialised into the light of his reading-lamp like some kindly genie.

'I was hoping you'd be asleep,' she said. 'I don't really think you should start on these tonight.'

'If there is anything that is likely to put me to sleep,' he said, 'it would be an English history book. So you can hold hands with a clear conscience.'

'I'm going with Nurse Burrows.'

'You can still hold hands.'

'I've no patience with you,' she said patiently and faded backwards into the gloom.

She had brought two books.

One was the kind of history book known as a Historical Reader. It bore the same relation to history as Stories from the Bible bears to Holy Writ. Canute rebuked his courtiers on the shore, Alfred burned the cakes, Raleigh spread his cloak for Elizabeth, Nelson took leave of Hardy in his cabin on the Victory, all in nice clear large print and one-sentence paragraphs. To each episode went one full-page illustration.

There was something curiously touching in the fact that The Amazon should treasure this childish literature. He turned to the fly-leaf to see if her name was there. On the fly-leaf was written:

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Ella Darroll,
Form III
Newbridge High School,
Newbridge,
Gloucestershire.
England
Europe,
The World
The Universe.
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This was surrounded by a fine selection of coloured transfers.

Did all children do that, he wondered? Write their names like that, and spend their time in class making transfers. He certainly had. And the sight of those squares of bright primitive colour brought back his childhood as nothing had for many years. He had forgotten the excitement of transfers. That wonderfully satisfying moment when you began the peeling-off and saw that it was coming perfectly. The adult world held few such gratifications. A clean smacking drive at golf, perhaps, was the nearest. Or the moment when your line tightened and you knew that the fish had struck.

The little book pleased him so much that he went through it at his leisure. Solemnly reading each childish story. This, after all, was the history that every adult remembered. This was what remained in their minds when tonnage and poundage, and ship money, and Laud's Liturgy, and the Rye House Plot, and the Triennial Acts, and all the long muddle of schism and shindy, treaty and treason, had faded from their consciousness.

The Richard III story, when he came to it, was called *The Princes In The Tower*, and it seemed that young Ella had found the Princes a poor substitute for Coeur-de-Lion, since she had filled every small O throughout the tale with neat pencil shading. The two golden-haired boys who played together in the sunbeam from the barred window in the accompanying picture had each been provided with a pair of anachronistic spectacles, and on the blank back of the

picture-page someone had been playing Noughts and Crosses. As far as young Ella was concerned the Princes were a dead loss.

And yet it was a sufficiently arresting little story. Macabre enough to delight any child's heart. The innocent children; the wicked uncle. The classic incredients in a tale of classic simplicity.

It had also a moral. It was the perfect cautionary tale.

But the King won no profit from this wicked deed. The people of England were shocked by his cold-blooded cruelty and decided that they would no longer have him for King. They sent for a distant cousin of Richard's, Henry Tudor, who was living in France, to come and be crowned King in his stead. Richard died bravely in the battle which resulted, but he had made his name hated throughout the country and many deserted him to fight for his rival.

Well, it was neat but not gaudy. Reporting at its simplest.

He turned to the second book.

The second book was the School History proper. The two thousand years of England's story were neatly parcelled into compartments for ready reference. The compartments, as usual, were reigns. It was no wonder that one pinned a personality to a reign, forgetful that that personality had known and lived under other kings. One put them in pigeon-holes automatically. Pepys: Charles II. Shakespeare: Elizabeth. Marlborough: Queen Anne. It never crossed one's mind that someone who had seen Queen Elizabeth could also have seen George I. One had been conditioned to the reign idea from childhood.

However it did simplify things when you were just a policeman with a game leg and a concussed spine hunting up some information on dead and gone royalties to keep yourself from going crazy.

He was surprised to find the reign of Richard III so short. To have made oneself one of the best-known rulers in all those two thousand years of England's history, and to have had only two years to do it in, surely augured a towering personality. If Richard had not made friends he had certainly influenced people.

The history book, too, thought that he had personality.

Richard was a man of great ability, but quite unscrupulous as to his means. He boldly claimed the crown on the absurd ground that his brother's marriage with Elizabeth Woodville had been illegal and the children of it illegitimate. He was accepted by the people who dreaded a minority, and began his reign by making a progress through the south, where he was well received. During this progress, however, the two young Princes who were living in the Tower, disappeared, and were believed to have been murdered. A serious rebellion followed, which Richard put down with great ferocity. In order to recover some of his lost popularity he held a Parliament, which passed useful statutes against Benevolences, Maintenance, and Livery.

But a second rebellion followed. This took the form of an invasion, with French troops, by the head of the Lancaster branch, Henry Tudor. He encountered Richard at Bosworth, near Leicester, where the treachery of the Stanleys gave the day to Henry. Richard was killed in the battle, fighting courageously, leaving behind him a name hardly less infamous than that of John.

What on earth were Benevolences, Maintenance, and Livery?

And how did the English like having the succession decided for them by French troops?

But, of course, in the days of the Roses, France was still a sort of semi-detached part of England; a country much less foreign to an Englishman than Ireland was. A fifteenth-century Englishman went to France as a matter of course; but to Ireland only under protest.

He lay and thought about that England. The England over which the Wars of the Roses had been fought. A green, green England; with not a chimney-stack from Cumberland to Cornwall. An England still unhedged, with great forests alive with game, and wide marshes thick with wild-fowl. An England with the same small group of dwellings repeated every few miles in endless permutation: castle, church, and cottages; monastery, church, and cottages; manor, church, and cottages. The strips of cultivation round the cluster of dwellings, and beyond that the greenness. The unbroken greenness. The deeprutted lanes that ran from group to group, mired to bog in the winter and white with dust in the summer; decorated with wild roses or red with hawthorn as the seasons came and went.

For thirty years, over this green uncrowded land, the Wars of the Roses had been fought. But it had been more of a blood feud than a war. A Montague and Capulet affair; of no great concern to the average Englishman. No one pushed in at your door to demand whether you were York or Lancaster and to hale you off to a concentration camp if your answer proved to be the wrong one for the occasion. It was a small concentrated war; almost a private party. They fought a battle in your lower meadow, and turned your kitchen into a dressing-station, and then moved off somewhere or other to fight a battle somewhere else, and a few weeks later you would hear what had happened at that battle, and you would have a family row about the result because your wife was probably Lancaster and you were perhaps York, and it was all rather like following rival football teams. No one persecuted you for being a Lancastrian or a Yorkist, any more than you would be persecuted for being an Arsenal fan or a Chelsea follower.

He was still thinking of that green England when he fell asleep.

And he was not a whit wiser about the two young Princes and their fate.

'Can't you find something more cheerful to look at than that thing?' The Midget asked next morning, referring to the Richard portrait which Grant had propped up against the pile of books on his bed-side table.

'You don't find it an interesting face?'

'Interesting! It gives me the willies. A proper Dismal Desmond.'

'According to the history books he was a man of great ability.'

'So was Bluebeard.'

'And considerable popularity, it would seem.'

'So was Bluebeard.'

'A very fine soldier, too,' Grant said wickedly, and waited. 'No Bluebeard offers?'

'What do you want to look at that face for? Who was he anyway?'

'Richard the Third.'

'Oh, well, I ask you!'

'You mean that's what you expected him to look like.'

'Exactly.'

'Why?'

'A murdering brute, wasn't he?'

'You seem to know your history.'

'Everyone knows that. Did away with his two little nephews, poor brats. Had them smothered.'

'Smothered?' said Grant, interested. 'I didn't know that.'

'Smothered with pillows.' She banged his own pillows with a fragile vigorous fist, and replaced them with speed and precision.

'Why smothering? Why not poison?' Grant inquired.

'Don't ask me. I didn't arrange it.'

'Who said they were smothered?'

'My history book at school said it.'

'Yes, but whom was the history book quoting?'

'Quoting? It wasn't quoting anything. It was just giving facts.'

'Who smothered them, did it say?'

'A man called Tyrrel. Didn't you do any history, at school?'

'I attended history lessons. It is not the same thing. Who was Tyrrel?'

'I haven't the remotest. A friend of Richard's.'

'How did anyone know it was Tyrrel?'

'He confessed.'

'Confessed?'

'After he had been found guilty, of course. Before he was hanged.'

'You mean that this Tyrrel was actually hanged for the murder of the two Princes?'

'Yes, of course. Shall I take that dreary face away and put up something gayer? There were quite a lot of nice faces in that bundle Miss Hallard brought you yesterday.'

'I'm not interested in nice faces. I'm interested only in dreary ones; in "murdering brutes" who are "men of great ability".'

'Well, there's no accounting for tastes,' said The Midget inevitably.'And *I* don't have to look at it, thank goodness. But in my humble estimation it's enough to prevent bones knitting, so help me it is.'

'Well, if my fracture doesn't mend you can put it down to Richard III's account. Another little item on that account won't be noticed, it seems to me.'

He must ask Marta when next she looked in if she too knew about this Tyrrel. Her general knowledge was not very great, but she had been educated very expensively at a highly approved school and perhaps some of it had stuck.

But the first visitor to penetrate from the outside world proved to be Sergeant Williams; large and pink and scrubbed-looking; and for a little Grant forgot about battles long ago and considered wide boys alive today. Williams sat planted on the small hard visitors' chair, his knees apart and his pale blue eyes blinking like a contented cat's in the light from the window, and Grant regarded him with affection. It was pleasant to talk shop again; to use that elliptical, allusive speech that one uses only with another of one's trade. It was pleasant to hear the professional gossip, to talk professional politics; to learn who was on the mat and who was on the skids.

'The Super sent his regards,' Williams said as he got up to go, 'and said if there was anything he could do for you to let him know.' His eyes, no longer dazzled by the light, went to the photograph propped against the books. He leant his head sideways at it. 'Who's the bloke?'

Grant was just about to tell him when it occurred to him that here was a fellow policeman. A man as used, professionally, to faces as he was himself. Someone to whom faces were of daily importance.

'Portrait of a man by an unknown fifteenth-century painter,' he said. 'What do you make of it?'

'I don't know the first thing about painting.'

'I didn't mean that. I meant what do you make of the subject?'

'Oh. Oh, I see.' Williams bent forward and drew his bland brows into a travesty of concentration. 'How do you mean "make of it"?'

'Well, where would you place him? In the dock or on the bench?'

Williams considered for a moment, and then said with confidence: 'Oh, on the bench.'

'You would?'

'Certainly. Why? Wouldn't you?'

'Yes. But the odd thing is that we're both wrong. He belongs in the dock.'

'You surprise me,' Williams said, peering again. 'Do you know who he was, then?'

'Yes. Richard the Third.'

Williams whistled.

'So that's who it is, is it! Well, well. The Princes in the Tower, and all that. The original Wicked Uncle. I suppose, once you know, you can see it, but off-hand it wouldn't occur to you. I mean, that he was a crook. He's the spit of old Halsbury, come to think of it, and if Halsbury had a fault at all it was that he was too soft with the blighters in the dock. He used to lean over backwards to give them the benefit in his summing-up.'

'Do you know how the Princes were murdered?'

'I don't know a thing about Richard III except that his mother was two years conceiving him.'

'What! Where did you get that tale?'

'In my school history, I suppose.'

'You must have gone to a very remarkable school. Conception was not mentioned in any history book of mine. That is what made Shakespeare and the Bible so refreshing as lessons; the facts of life were always turning up. Did you ever hear of a man called Tyrrel?'

'Yes; he was a con. man on the P. & O. boats. Drowned in the Egypt.'

'No; I mean, in history.'

'I tell you, I never knew any history except 1066 and 1603.'

'What happened in 1603?' Grant asked, his mind still on Tyrrel.

'We had the Scots tied to our tails for good.'

'Better than having them at our throats every five minutes. Tyrrel is said to be the man who put the boys out of the way.'

'The nephews? No, it doesn't ring a bell. Well, I must be getting along. Anything I can do for you?'

'Did you say you were going to Charing Cross Road?'

'To the Phoenix, yes.'

'You could do something for me.'

'What is that?'

'Go into one of the bookshops and buy me a History of England. An adult one. And a Life of Richard III, if you can find one.'

'Sure, I'll do that.'

As he was going out he encountered The Amazon, and looked startled to find anything as large as himself in nurse's uniform. He murmured a good-morning in an abashed way, cast a questioning glance at Grant, and faded into the corridor.

The Amazon said that she was supposed to be giving Number Four her blanket bath but that she had to look in to see if he was convinced.

'Convinced?'

About the nobility of Richard Coeur-de-Lion.

'I haven't got round to Richard the First yet. But keep Number Four waiting a few moments longer and tell me what you know about Richard III.'

'Ah, those poor lambs!' she said, her great cow's-eyes soft with pity.

'Who?

'Those two precious little boys. It used to be my nightmare when I was a kiddy. That someone would come and put a pillow over my face when I was asleep.'

'Is that how it was done: the murder?'

'Oh, yes. Didn't you know? Sir James Tyrrel rode back to London when the court was at Warwick, and told Dighton and Forrest to kill them, and then they buried them at the foot of some stairs under a great mound of stones.'

'But it doesn't say that in the book you lent me.'

'Oh, that book is just history-for-exams, if you know what I mean. You don't get really interesting history in swot books like that.'

'And where did you get the juicy gossip about Tyrrel, may one ask?'

'It isn't gossip,' she said, hurt. 'You'll find it in Sir Thomas More's history of his time. And you can't find a more respected or trustworthy person in the whole of history than Sir Thomas More, now can you?'

'No. It would be bad manners to contradict Sir Thomas.'

'Well, that's what Sir Thomas says, and, after all, he was alive then and knew all those people to talk to.'

'Dighton and Forrest?'

'No, of course not. But Richard, and the poor Queen, and those.'

'The Queen? Richard's Queen?'

'Vec

'Why "poor"?'

'He led her an awful life. They say he poisoned her. He wanted to marry his niece.'

'Why?'

'Because she was the heir to the throne.'

'I see. He got rid of the two boys, and then wanted to marry their eldest sister.'

'Yes. He couldn't marry either of the boys, you see.'

'No, I suppose even Richard the Third never thought of that one.'

'So he wanted to marry Elizabeth so as to feel safer on the throne. Actually, of course, she married his successor. She was Queen Elizabeth's grandmother. It always used to please me that Elizabeth was a little bit Plantagenet. I never was very fond of the Tudor side. Now I must go, or Matron will be here on her round before I have Number Four tidied up.'

'That would be the end of the world.'

'It would be the end of me,' she said, and went away.

Grant took the book she had lent him off the pile again, and tried to make head or tail of the Wars of the Roses. He failed. Armies marched and counter-marched. York and Lancaster succeeded each other as victors in a bewildering repetition. It was as meaningless as watching a crowd of dodgem cars bumping and whirling at a fair.

But it seemed to him that the whole trouble was implicit, the germ of it sown, nearly a hundred years earlier, when the direct line was broken by the deposition of Richard II. He knew all about that because he had in his youth seen *Richard of Bordeaux* at the New Theatre; four times he had seen it. For three generations the usurping Lancasters had ruled England: Richard of Bordeaux's Henry unhappily but with fair efficiency, Shakespeare's Prince Hal with Agincourt for glory and the stake for zeal, and his son in half-witted muddle and failure. It was no wonder if men hankered after the legitimate line again, as they watched poor Henry VI's inept friends frittering away the victories in France while Henry nursed his new foundation of Eton and besought the ladies at court to cover up their bosoms.

All three Lancasters had had an unlovely fanaticism which contrasted sharply with the liberalism of the Court which had died with Richard II. Richard's live-and-let-live methods had given place, almost overnight, to the burning of heretics. For three generations heretics had burned. It was no wonder if a less public fire of discontent had begun to smoulder in the heart of the man in the street.

Especially since there, before their eyes, was the Duke of York. Able, sensible, influential, gifted, a great prince in his own right, and by blood the heir of Richard II. They might not desire that York should take the place of poor silly Henry, but they did wish that he would take over the running of the country and clean up the mess.

York tried it, and died in battle for his pains, and his family spent much time in exile or sanctuary as a result.

But when the tumult and the shouting was all over, there on the throne of England was the son who had fought alongside him in that struggle, and the country settled back happily under that tall, flaxen, wenching, exceedingly beautiful but most remarkably shrewd young man, Edward IV.

And that was as near as Grant would ever come to understanding the Wars of the Roses.

He looked up from his book to find Matron standing in the middle of the room.

'I did knock,' she said, 'but you were lost in your book.'

She stood there, slender and remote; as elegant in her way as Marta was; her white-cuffed hands clasped loosely in front of her narrow waist; her white veil spreading itself in imperishable dignity; her only ornament the small silver badge of her diploma. Grant wondered if there was anywhere in this world a more unshakable poise than that achieved by the matron of a great hospital.

'I've taken to history,' he said. 'Rather late in the day.'

'An admirable choice,' she said. 'It puts things in perspective.' Her eye lighted on the portrait and she said: 'Are you York or Lancaster?'

'So you recognise the portrait.'

'Oh, yes. When I was a probationer I used to spend a lot of time in the National. I had very little money and very sore feet, and it was warm in the Gallery and quiet and it had plenty of seats.' She smiled a very little, looking back from her present consequence to that young, tired, earnest creature that she had been. 'I liked the Portrait Gallery best because it gave one the same sense of proportion that reading history does. All those Importances who had made such a to-do over so much in their day. All just names. Just canvas and paint. I saw a lot of that portrait in those days.' Her attention went back to the picture. 'A most unhappy creature,' she said.

'My surgeon thinks it is poliomyelitis.'

'Polio?' She considered it. 'Perhaps. I hadn't thought of it before. But to me it has always seemed to be intense unhappiness. It is the most desperately unhappy face that I have ever encountered and I have encountered a great many.'

'You think it was painted later than the murder, then?'

'Oh, yes. Obviously. He is not a type that would do anything lightly. A man of that calibre. He must have been well aware of how heinous the crime was.'

'You think he belonged to the type who can't live with themselves any more.'

'What a good description! Yes. The kind who want something badly, and then discover that the price they have paid for it is too high.'

'So you don't think he was an out-and-out villain?'

'No; oh, no. Villains don't suffer, and that face is full of the most dreadful pain.'

They considered the portrait in silence for a moment or two.

'It must have seemed like retribution, you know. Losing his only boy so soon after. And his wife's death. Being stripped of his own personal world in so short a time. It must have seemed like Divine justice.'

'Would he care about his wife?'

'She was his cousin, and they had known each other from childhood. So whether he loved her or not, she must have been a companion for him. When you sit on a throne I suspect that companionship is a rare blessing. Now I must go and see how my hospital is getting on. I have not even asked the question that I came to ask. Which was how you felt this morning. But it is a very healthy sign that you have interest to spare for a man dead these four hundred years.'

She had not moved from the position in which he had first caught sight of her. Now she smiled her faint, withdrawn smile, and with her hands still clasped lightly in front of her belt-buckle moved towards the door. She had a transcendental repose. Like a nun. Like a queen.

It was after luncheon before Sergeant Williams reappeared, breathless, bearing two fat volumes.

'You should have left them with the porter,' Grant said. 'I didn't mean you to come sweating up here with them.'

'I had to come up and explain. I had only time to go to one shop, but it's the biggest in the street. That's the best history of England they have in stock. It's the best there is anywhere, they say.' He laid down a severe-looking sage-green tome, with an air of taking no responsibility for it. 'They had no separate history of Richard III. I mean, no life of him. But they gave me this.' This was a gay affair with a coat of arms on the wrapper. It was called *The Rose of Raby*.

'What is this?'

'She was his mother, it seems. The Rose in question, I mean. I can't wait: I'm due at the Yard in five minutes from now and the Super will flay me alive if I'm late. Sorry I couldn't do better. I'll look in again, first time I'm passing, and if these are no good I'll see what else I can get.'

Grant was grateful and said so.

To the sound of Williams' brisk departing footsteps he began his inspection of the 'best history of England there is'. It turned out to be what is known as a 'constitutional' history; a sober compilation lightened with improving illustrations. An illumination from the Luttrell Psalter decorated the husbandry of the fourteenth century, and a contemporary map of London bisected the Great Fire. Kings and Queens were mentioned only incidentally. Tanner's Constitutional History was concerned only with social progress and political evolution; with the Black Death, and the invention of printing, and the use of gunpowder, and the formation of the Trade Guilds, and so forth. But here and there Mr Tanner was forced, by a horrid germaneness, to mention a King or his relations. And one such germaneness occurred in connection with the invention of printing.

A man called Caxton came out of the Weald of Kent as draper's apprentice to a future Lord Mayor of London, and then went to Bruges with the twenty merks his master left him in his will. And when, in the dreary autumn rain of the Low Countries, two young refugees from England fetched up on those low shores, in very low water, it was the successful merchant from the Weald of Kent who gave them succour. The refugees were Edward IV and his brother Richard; and when in the turn of the wheel Edward came back to rule England, Caxton came too, and the first books printed in England were printed for Edward IV and written by Edward's brother-in-law.

He turned the pages and marvelled how dull information is deprived of personality. The sorrows of humanity are no one's sorrows, as newspaper readers long ago found out. A frisson of horror may go down one's spine at wholesale destruction but one's heart stays unmoved. A thousand people drowned in floods in China are news: a solitary child drowned in a pond is tragedy. So Mr Tanner's account of the progress of the English race was admirable but unexciting. But here and there where he could not avoid the personal his narrative flowered into a more immediate interest. In extracts from the Pastons' letters, for instance. The Pastons had a habit of sandwiching scraps of history between orders for salad oil and inquiries as to how Clement was doing at Cambridge. And between two of those domesticities appeared the small item that the two little York boys, George, and Richard, were living in the Pastons' London lodgings, and that their brother Edward came every day to see them.

Surely, thought Grant, dropping the book for a moment on the counterpane and staring up at the now invisible ceiling, surely never before can anyone have come to the throne of England with so personal an experience of the ordinary man's life as Edward IV and his brother Richard. And perhaps only Charles II after them. And Charles, even in poverty and flight, had always been a King's son; a man apart. The two little boys who were living in the Pastons' lodgings were merely the babies of the York family. Of no particular importance at the best of times, and at the moment when the Paston letter was written without a home and possibly without a future.

Grant readied for The Amazon's history book to find out what Edward was about in London at that date, and learned that he was collecting an army. 'London was always Yorkist in temper, and men flocked with enthusiasm to the banner of the youthful Edward,' said the history book.

And yet young Edward, aged eighteen, idol of a capital city and on the way to the first of his victories, found time to come every day to see his small brothers.

Was it now, Grant wondered, that the remarkable devotion of Richard to his elder brother was born. An unwavering lifelong devotion that the history books not only did not deny but actually used in order to point the moral. 'Up to the moment of his brother's death Richard had been in all vicissitudes his loyal and faithful helpmeet, but the opportunity of a crown proved too much for him.' Or in the simpler words of the Historical Reader: 'He had been a good brother to Edward but when he saw that he might become King greed hardened his heart.'

Grant took a sideways look at the portrait and decided that the Historical Reader was off the beam. Whatever had hardened Richard's heart to the point of murder had not been greed. Or did the Historical Reader mean greed for power? Probably. Probably.

But surely Richard must have had all the power that mortal man could wish. He was the King's brother, and rich. Was that short step further so important that he could murder his brother's children to achieve it?

It was an odd set-up altogether.

He was still mulling it over in his mind when Mrs Tinker came in with fresh pyjamas for him and her daily précis of the newspaper headlines. Mrs Tinker never read past the third headline of a report unless it happened to be a murder, in which case she read every word and bought an evening paper for herself on the way home to cook Tinker's supper.

Today the gentle burble of her comment on a Yorkshire arsenic-and-exhumation case flowed over him unbroken until she caught sight of the morning paper lying in its virgin condition alongside the books on the table. This brought her to a sudden halt.

'You not feelin' so good today?' she asked in a concerned way.

'I'm fine, Tink, fine. Why?'

'You 'aven't as much as opened your paper. That's 'ow my sister's gel started her decline. Not takin' no notice of what was in the paper.'

'Don't you worry. I'm on the up-grade. Even my temper has improved. I forgot about the paper because I've been reading history stories. Ever heard of the Princes in the Tower?'

'Everyone's 'eard of the Princes in the Tower.'

'And do you know how they met their end?'

'Course I do. He put a pillow on their faces when they was asleep.'

'Who did?

'Their wicked uncle. Richard the Third. You didn't ought to think of things like that when you're poorly. You ought to be reading something nice and cheerful.'

'Are you in a hurry to get home, Tink, or could you go round by St Martin's Lane for me?'

'No, I've plenty of time. Is it Miss Hallard? She won't be at the theatre till six-about.'

'No, I know. But you might leave a note for her and she'll get it when she comes in.'

He reached for his scribbling pad and pencil and wrote:

'For the love of Mike find me a copy of Thomas More's history of Richard III.'

He tore off the page, folded it and scribbled Marta's name on it.

'You can give it to old Saxton at the stage-door. He'll see that she gets it.'

'If I can get near the stage-door what with the stools for the queue,' Mrs Tinker said; in comment rather than in truth. 'That thing's going to run for ever.'

She put the folded paper carefully away in the cheap pseudo-leather handbag with the shabby edges that was as much a part of her as her hat. Grant had, Christmas by Christmas, provided her with a new bag; each of them a work of art in the best tradition of English leather-working, an article so admirable in design and so perfect in execution that Marta Hallard might have carried it to luncheon at the Blague. But that was the last he had ever seen of any of them. Since Mrs Tinker regarded a pawnshop as one degree more disgraceful than prison, he absolved her from any suspicion of cashing in on her presents. He deduced that the handbags were safely laid away in a drawer somewhere, still wrapped up in the original tissue paper. Perhaps she took them out to show people sometimes, sometimes perhaps just to gloat over; or perhaps the knowledge that they were there enriched her, as the knowledge of 'something put by for my funeral' might enrich another. Next Christmas he was going to open this shabby sack of hers, this perennial satchel à *toute faire*, and put something in the money compartment. She would fritter it away, of course, on small unimportances; so that in the end she would not know what she had done with it; but perhaps a series of small satisfactions scattered like sequins over the texture of everyday life was of greater worth than the academic satisfaction of owning a collection of fine objects at the back of a drawer.

When she had gone creaking away, in a shoes-and-corset concerto, he went back to Mr Tanner and tried to improve his mind by acquiring some of Mr Tanner's interest in the human race. But he found it an effort. Neither by nature nor by profession was he interested in mankind in the large. His bias, native and acquired, was towards the personal. He waded through Mr Tanner's statistics and longed for a king in an oak-tree, or a broom tied to a mast-head, or a Highlander hanging on to a trooper's stirrup in a charge. But at least he had the satisfaction of learning that the Englishman of the fifteenth century 'drank water only as a penance'. The English labourer of Richard III's day was, it seemed, the admiration of the continent. Mr Tanner quoted a contemporary, writing in France.

The King of France will allow no one to use salt, but what is bought of himself at his own arbitrary price. The troops pay for nothing, and treat the people barbarously if they are not satisfied. All growers of vines must give a fourth to the King. All the towns must pay the King great yearly sums for his men-at-arms. The peasants live in great hardship and misery. They wear no woollen. Their clothing consists of little short jerkins of sackcloth, no trowse but from the knees up, and legs exposed and naked. The women all go barefoot. The people eat no meat, except the fat of bacon in their soup. Nor are the gentry much better off. If an accusation is brought against them they are examined in private, and perhaps never more heard of.

In England it is very different. No one can abide in another man's house without his leave. The King cannot put on taxes, nor alter the laws, nor make new ones. The English never drink water except for penance. They eat all sorts of flesh and fish. They are clothed throughout in good woollens, and are provided with all sorts of household goods. An Englishman cannot be sued except before the ordinary judge.

And it seemed to Grant that if you were very hard up and wanted to go to see what your Lizzie's first-born looked like it must have been reassuring to know that there was shelter and a hand-out at every religious house, instead of wondering

how you were going to raise the train fare. That green England he had fallen asleep with last night had a lot to be said for it.

He thumbed through the pages on the fifteenth century, looking for personal items; for individual reports that might, in their single vividness, illumine the scene for him as a 'spot' lights the desired part of a stage. But the story was distressingly devoted to the general. According to Mr Tanner, Richard III's only Parliament was the most liberal and progressive within record; and he regretted, did the worthy Mr Tanner, that his private crimes should have militated against his patent desire for the common weal. And that seemed to be all that Mr Tanner had to say about Richard III. Except for the Pastons, chatting indestructibly through the centuries, there was a dearth of human beings in this record of humanity.

He let the book slide off his chest, and searched with his hand until he found *The Rose of Raby*.

The Rose of Raby proved to be fiction; but it was at least easier to hold than Tanner's Constitutional History of England. It was, moreover, the almost-respectable form of historical fiction which is merely history-with-conversation, so to speak. An imaginative biography rather than an imagined story. Evelyn Payne-Ellis, whoever she might be, had provided portraits and a family tree, and had made no attempt, it seemed, to what he and his cousin Laura used to call in their childhood write forsoothly'. There was no 'by our Ladys', no 'nathelesses' or 'varlets'. It was an honest affair according to its lights.

And its lights were more illuminating than Mr Tanner.

Much more illuminating.

It was Grant's belief that if you could not find out about a man, the next best way to arrive at an estimate of him was to find out about his mother.

So until Marta could provide him with the sainted and infallible Thomas More's personal account of Richard, he would make do very happily with Cecily Nevill, Duchess of York.

He glanced at the family tree, and thought that if the two York brothers, Edward and Richard, were, as kings, unique in their experience of ordinary life they were no less unique in their Englishness. He looked at their breeding and marvelled. Nevill, Fitzalan, Percy, Holland, Mortimer, Clifford and Audley, as well as Plantagenet. Queen Elizabeth (who made it her boast) was all English; if one counted the Welsh streak as English. But among all the half-bred monarchs who had graced the throne between the Conquest and Farmer George — half-French, half-Spanish, half-Danish, half-Dutch, half-Portuguese — Edward IV and Richard III were remarkable in their home-bred quality.

They were also, he noted, as royally bred on their mother's side as on their father's. Cecily Nevill's grandfather was John of Gaunt, the first of the Lancasters; third son of Edward III. Her husband's two grandfathers were two other sons of Edward III. So three of Edwards III's five sons had contributed to the making of the two York brothers.

'To be a Nevill,' said Miss Payne-Ellis 'was to be of some importance since they were great landowners. To be a Nevill was almost certainly to be handsome, since they were a good-looking family. To be a Nevill was to have personality, since they excelled in displays of both character and temperament. To unite all three Nevill gifts, in their finest quality, in one person was the good fortune of Cicely Nevill, who was the sole Rose of the north long before that north was forced to choose between White Roses and Red.'

It was Miss Payne-Ellis's contention that the marriage with Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, was a love match. Grant received this theory with a scepticism bordering on scorn until he noticed the results of that marriage. To have a yearly addition to the family was not, in the fifteenth century, evidence of anything but fertility. And the long family produced by Cicely Nevill to her charming husband augured nothing nearer love than cohabitation. But in a time when the wife's rôle was to stay meekly at home and see to her still-room, Cecily Nevill's constant travellings about in her husband's company were surely remarkable enough to suggest an abnormal pleasure in that company. The extent and constancy of that travel was witnessed to by the birthplaces of her children. Anne, her first, was born at Fotheringhay, the family home in Northamptonshire. Henry, who died as a baby, at Hatfield. Edward at Rouen, where the Duke was on active service. Edmund and Elizabeth also at Rouen. Margaret at Fotheringhay. John, who died young, at Neath in Wales. George in Dublin (and could it be, wondered Grant, that that accounted for the almost Irish perverseness of the ineffable George?). Richard at Fotheringhay.

Cecily Nevill had not sat at home in Northamptonshire waiting for her lord and master to visit her when it seemed good to him. She had accompanied him about the world of their inhabiting. There was strong presumption in favour of Miss Payne-Ellis's theory. At the very canniest reckoning it was patently a very successful marriage.

Which perhaps accounted for the family devotion of those daily visits of Edward to his small brothers in the Pastons' lodgings. The York family, even before its tribulations, was a united one.

This was borne out unexpectedly when, spurting the pages from under his thumb, he came on a letter. It was a letter from the two elder boys, Edward and Edmund, to their father. The boys were at Ludlow Castle, undergoing their education, and on a Saturday in Easter week, taking advantage of a courier who was going back, they burst out in loud complaint of their tutor and his 'odiousness' and begged their father to listen to the tale of the courier, William Smyth, who was fully charged with the details of their oppression. This S.O.S. was introduced and ended in respectful padding, the formality of which was a little marred by their pointing out that it was nice of him to send the clothes but that he had forgotten their breviary.

The conscientious Miss Payne-Ellis had given the reference for this letter (one of the Cotton manuscripts, it appeared) and he thumbed more slowly, in search of more. Factual evidence was a policeman's meat.

He could not find any, but he came on a family tableau which held him for a moment.

The Duchess moved out into the thin sharp sunlight of a London December morning, and stood on the steps to watch them go: her husband, her brother, and her son. Dirk and his nephews brought the horses into the courtyard, scattering the pigeons and the fussing sparrows from the cobbles. She watched her husband mount, equable and deliberate as always, and thought that for all the emotion he showed he might be riding down to Fotheringhay to look at some new rams instead of setting out on a campaign. Salisbury, her brother, was being Nevill and temperamental; a little conscious of the occasion and living up to it. She looked at them both and smiled in her mind at them. But it was Edmund who caught at her

heart. Edmund at seventeen, very slender, very untried, very vulnerable. Flushed with pride and excitement at this settingout to his first campaigning. She wanted to say to her husband: 'Take care of Edmund,' but she could not do that. Her husband would not understand; and Edmund, if he were to suspect, would be furious. If Edward, only a year older, was commanding an army of his own on the borders of Wales at this very minute, then he, Edmund, was more than old enough to see war at first-hand.

She glanced behind her at the three younger children who had come out in her wake; Margaret and George, the two solid fair ones, and behind them, a pace in the rear as always, her changeling baby, Richard; his dark brows and brown hair making him look like a visitor. Good-natured untidy Margaret watched with all the moist-eyed emotion of fourteen; George in a passionate envy and wild rebellion that he was only eleven and of no consequence to this martial moment. Thin little Richard showed no excitement at all, but his mother thought that he vibrated like a softly tapped drum.

The three horses moved out of the courtyard in a clatter of slipping hooves and jingling accoutrements, to join the servants waiting for them in the roadway, and the children called and danced and waved them out of the gate.

And Cicely, who in her time had seen so many men, and so many of her family, go off to went back to the house with an unaccustomed weight at her bosom. Which of them, said the voice in her unwilling mind, which of them was it who was not coming back?

Her imagination did not compass anything so horrible as the fact that none of them was coming back again. That she would never see any one of them again.

That before the year was ended her husband's severed head, crowned for insult with a paper crown, would be nailed above the Micklegate Bar in York, and the heads of her brother and her son on the two other gates.

Well, that might be fiction, but it was an illuminating glimpse of Richard. The dark one in a blond family. The one who 'looked like a visitor'. The 'changeling'.

He abandoned Cicely Nevill for the moment, and went hunting through the book for her son Richard. But Miss Payne-Ellis seemed not to be greatly interested in Richard. He was merely the tail-end of the family. The magnificent young creature who flourished at the other end was more to her taste. Edward was much to the fore. With his Nevill cousin Warwick, Salisbury's son, he won the battle of Towton, and, with the memory of Lancastrian ferocity still fresh and his father's head still nailed to the Micklegate Bar, gave evidence of that tolerance that was to be characteristic of him. There was quarter at Towton for all who asked. He was crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey (and two small boys, home from exile in Utrecht, were created respectively Duke of Clarence and Duke of Gloucester). And he buried his father and his brother Edmund with great magnificence in the church at Fotheringhay (though it was Richard, aged thirteen, who convoyed that sad procession from Yorkshire, through the bright glory of five July days, to Northamptonshire; nearly six years after he had stood on the steps of Baynard's Castle in London to watch them ride away).

It was not until Edward had been King for some time that Miss Payne-Ellis allowed Richard to come back into the story. He was then being educated with his Nevill cousins at Middleham, in Yorkshire.

As Richard rode into the shadow of the keep, out of the broad sunlight and flying winds of Wensleydale, it seemed to him that there was an atmosphere of strangeness about the place. The guards were talking in loud excitement in the gatehouse and seemed abashed at his presence. From their sudden silence he rode on into a silent court that should have been bustling with activity at this hour of the day. It would soon be supper time, and both habit and hunger brought all the inhabitants of Middleham home from their various occupations, as they were bringing him back from his hawking, for the evening meal. This hush, this desertion, was unusual. He walked his horse to the stables, but there was no one there to give it to. As he unsaddled he noticed a hard-ridden bay in the next stall; a horse that did not belong to Middleham; a horse so tired that he had not eaten up and his head hung in a despondent beaten way between his knees.

Richard wiped his horse down and rugged him, brought him some hay and fresh water, and left him; wondering about that beaten horse and the uncanny silence. As he paused in the doorway he could hear voices in the distance of the great hall; and debated whether he should go there and investigate before going upstairs to his own quarters. As he hesitated a voice from the stairs above him said: 'Z-z-zt!'

He looked up to see his cousin Anne's head peering over the banisters, her two long fair plaits hanging down like bell-ropes.

'Richard!' she said, half whispering. 'Have you heard?'

'Is something wrong?' he asked. 'What is it?'

As he moved up to her she grabbed his hand and dragged him upwards towards their schoolroom in the roof.

'But what is it?' he asked, leaning back in protest against her urgency. 'What has happened? Is it something so awful that you can't tell me here!'

She swept him into the schoolroom and shut the door.

'It's Edward!'

'Edward? Is he ill?'

'No! Scandal!'

'Oh,' said Richard, relieved. Scandal and Edward were never far apart. 'What is it? Has he a new mistress?'

'Much worse than that! Oh, much, much worse. He's married.'

'Married?' said Richard, so unbelieving that he sounded calm. 'He can't be.'

'But he is. The news came from London an hour ago.'

'He can't be married,' Richard insisted. 'For a King marriage is a long affair. A matter of contracts, and agreements. A matter for Parliament, even, I think. What made you think he had got married?'

'I don't think,' Anne said, out of patience at this sober reception of her broadside. 'The whole family is raging together in the Great Hall over the affair.'

'Anne! have you been listening at the door?'

'Oh, don't be so righteous. I didn't have to listen very hard, anyhow. You could hear them on the other side of the river. He has married Lady Grey!'

'Who is Lady Grey? Lady Grey of Groby?'

'Yes.

'But he can't. She has two children and she is quite old.'

'She is five years older than Edward, and she is wonderfully beautiful so I overhear.'

'When did this happen?'

'They've been married for five months. They got married in secret down in Northamptonshire.'

'But I thought he was going to marry the King of France's sister.'

'So.' said Anne in a tone full of meaning 'did my father.'

'Yes: ves, it makes things very awkward for him, doesn't it: after all the negotiating.'

'According to the messenger from London he is throwing fits. It isn't only the making him look a fool. It seems she has cohorts of relations and he hates every one of them.'

'Edward must be possessed.' In Richard's hero-worshipping eyes everything Edward did had always been right. This folly, this undeniable, this inexcusable folly, could come only from possession.

'It will break my mother's heart,' he said. He thought of his mother's courage when his father and Edmund had been killed, and the Lancastrian army was almost at the gates of London. She had not wept nor wrapped herself in protective veils of self-pity. She had arranged that he and George should go to Utrecht, as if she were arranging for them to go away to school. They might never see each other again, but she had busied herself about warm clothes for their winter voyage across the Channel with a calm and dry-eyed practicality.

How would she bear this; this further blow? This destructive folly. This shattering foolishness.

'Yes,' said Anne, softening. 'Poor Aunt Cecily. It is monstrous of Edward to hurt everyone so. Monstrous.'

But Edward was still the infallible. If Edward had done wrong it was because he was ill, or possessed, or bewitched. Edward still had Richard's allegiance; his heart-whole and worshipping allegiance.

Nor in after years was that allegiance – an adult allegiance of recognition and acceptance – ever less than heart-whole. And then the story went on to Cicely Nevill's tribulation, and her efforts to bring some kind of order into the relations between her son Edward, half-pleased half-ashamed, and her nephew Warwick, wholly furious. There was also a long description of that indestructibly virtuous beauty with the famous 'gilt' hair, who had succeeded where more complaisant beauties had failed; and of her enthroning at Reading Abbey (led to the throne by a silently protesting Warwick, who could not but note the large array of Woodvilles, come to see their sister Elizabeth acknowledged Queen of England).

The next time Richard turned up in the tale he was setting out from Lynn without a penny in his pocket, in a Dutch vessel that happened to be in the harbour when it was needed. Along with him was his brother Edward, Edward's friend Lord Hastings, and a few followers. None of them had anything except what they stood up in, and after some argument the ship's captain agreed to accept Edward's fur-lined cape as fare.

Warwick had finally decided that the Woodville clan was more than he could stomach. He had helped to put his cousin Edward on the throne of England; he could just as easily unseat him. For the achievement of this he had the help of the whole Nevill brood; and, incredibly, the active assistance of the ineffable George. Who had decided that falling heir to half the lands of Montague, Nevill, and Beauchamp, by marrying Warwick's other daughter Isabel, was a better bet than being loyal to his brother Edward. In eleven days Warwick was master of a surprised England, and Edward and Richard were squelching through the October mud between Alkmaar and The Hague.

From then on, Richard was always in the background of the story. Through that dreary winter in Bruges. Staying with Margaret in Burgundy for that kind moist-eyed Margaret who had stood on the steps of Baynard's Castle with himself and George to watch their father ride away was now the very new Duchess of Burgundy. Margaret, kind Margaret, was saddened and dismayed as many people in future were to be saddened and dismayed – by George's inexplicable conduct, and set herself to missionary work while she got together funds for her two more admirable brothers.

Not even Miss Payne-Ellis's interest in the magnificent Edward allowed her to conceal that the real work of outfitting the ships hired with Margaret's money was done by Richard; a Richard not yet eighteen. And when Edward with an absurd handful of followers found himself once more camped in an English meadow, facing George with an army, it was Richard who went over to George's camp and talked the Margaret-weakened George into alliance again and so left the road to London open to them.

Not, Grant thought, that this last was any great achievement. George could obviously be talked into anything. He was a born missionee.

He had not nearly exhausted *The Rose of Raby* and the illicit joys of fiction when, next morning about eleven, a parcel arrived from Marta containing the more respectable entertainment of history as recorded by the sainted Sir Thomas.

With the book was a note in Marta's large sprawling writing on Marta's stiff expensive notepaper.

Have to send this instead of bringing it. Frantically busy. Think I have got M.M. to the sticking point re Blessington. No T. More in any of the bookshops, so tried Public Library. Can't think why one never thinks of Public Libraries. Probably because books expected to be soupy. Think this looks quite clean and unsoupy. You get fourteen days. Sounds like a sentence rather than a loan. Hope this interest in Crouchback means that the prickles are less nettlish. Till soon.

Marta.

The book did indeed look clean and unsoupy, if a little elderly. But after the light going of *The Rose* its print looked unexciting and its solid paragraphs forbidding. Nevertheless he attacked it with interest. This was, after all, where Richard III was concerned. 'the horse's mouth'.

He came to the surface an hour later, vaguely puzzled and ill at ease. It was not that the matter surprised him; the facts were very much what he had expected them to be. It was that this was not how he had expected Sir Thomas to write.

He took ill rest at nights, lay long waking and musing; sore wearied with care and watch, he slumbered rather than slept. So was his restless heart continually tossed and tumbled with the tedious impression and stormy remembrance of his most abominable deeds.

That was all right. But when he added that 'this he had from such as were secret with his chamberers' one was suddenly repelled. An aroma of back-stair gossip and servants' spying came off the page. So that one's sympathy tilted before one was aware of it from the smug commentator to the tortured creature sleepless on his bed. The murderer seemed of greater stature than the man who was writing of him.

Which was all wrong.

Grant was conscious too of the same unease that filled him when he listened to a witness telling a perfect story that he knew to be flawed somewhere.

And that was very puzzling indeed. What could possibly be wrong with the personal account of a man revered for his integrity as Thomas More had been revered for four centuries?

The Richard who appeared in More's account was, Grant thought, one that Matron would have recognised. A man highly-strung and capable of both great evil and great suffering. 'He was never quiet in his mind, never thought himself secure. His eyes whirled about, his body was privily fenced, his hands ever on his dagger, his countenance and manner like one always ready to strike again.'

And of course there was the dramatic, not to say hysterical, scene that Grant remembered from his schooldays; that every schoolboy probably remembered. The council scene in the Tower before he laid claim to the crown. Richard's sudden challenge to Hastings as to what was the proper fate for a man who plotted the death of the Protector of the Kingdom. The insane claim that Edward's wife and Edward's mistress (Jane Shore) were responsible for his withered arm by their sorcery. The smiting of the table in his rage, which was the signal for his armed satellites to burst in and arrest Lord Hastings, Lord Stanley, and John Morton, Bishop of Ely. The rushing of Hastings down into the courtyard and his beheading on a handy log of wood after bare time to confess himself to the first priest who could be found.

That was certainly the picture of a man who would act first in fury, in fear, in revenge – and repent afterwards.

But it seemed that he was capable of more calculated iniquity. He caused a sermon to be preached by a certain Dr Shaw, brother of the Lord Mayor, at Paul's Cross, on June 22, on the text: 'Bastard slips shall take no root.' Wherein Dr Shaw maintained that both Edward and George were sons of the Duchess of York by some unknown man, and that Richard was the only legitimate son of the Duke and Duchess of York.

This was so unlikely, so inherently absurd, that Grant went back and read it over again. But it still said the same thing. That Richard had traduced his mother, in public and for his own material advantage, with an unbelievable infamy.

Well, Sir Thomas More said it. And if anyone should know it would be Thomas More. And if anyone should know how to pick and choose between the credibilities in the reporting of a story it ought to be Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England.

Richard's mother, said Sir Thomas, complained bitterly of the slander with which her son had smirched her. Understandably, on the whole, Grant thought.

As for Dr Shaw, he was overcome with remorse. So much so that 'within a few days he withered and consumed away'.

Had a stroke, probably, Grant considered. And little wonder. To have stood up and told that tale to a London crowd must have taken some nerve.

Sir Thomas's account of the Princes in the Tower was the same as The Amazon's, but Sir Thomas's version was more detailed. Richard had suggested to Robert Brackenbury, Constable of the Tower, that it might be a good thing if the Princes disappeared, but Brackenbury would have no part in such an act. Richard therefore waited until he was at Warwick, during his progress through England after his coronation and then sent Tyrrel to London with orders that he was

to receive the keys of the Tower for one night. During that night two ruffians, Dighton and Forrest, one a groom and one a warder, smothered the two boys.

At this point The Midget came in with his lunch and removed the book from his grasp; and while he forked the shepherd's pie from plate to mouth he considered again the face of the man in the dock. The faithful and patient small brother who had turned into a monster.

When The Midget came back for his tray he said: 'Did you know that Richard III was a very popular person in his day? Before he came to the throne, I mean.'

The Midget cast a baleful glance at the picture.

'Always was a snake in the grass, if you ask me. Smooth, that's what he was: smooth. Biding his time.'

Biding his time for what? he wondered, as she tapped away down the corridor. He could not have known that his brother Edward would die unexpectedly at the early age of forty. He could not have foreseen (even after a childhood shared with him in uncommon intimacy) that George's on-goings would end in attainder and the debarring of his two children from the succession. There seemed little point in 'biding one's time' if there was nothing to bide for. The indestructibly virtuous beauty with the gilt hair had, except for her incurable nepotism, proved an admirable Queen and had provided Edward with a large brood of healthy children, including two boys. The whole of that brood, together with George and his son and daughter, stood between Richard and the throne. It was surely unlikely that a man busy with the administration of the North of England, or campaigning (with dazzling success) against the Scots, would have much spare interest in being 'smooth'.

What then had changed him so fundamentally in so short a time?

Grant reached for *The Rose of Raby* to see what Miss Payne-Ellis had had to say about the unhappy metamorphosis of Cecily Nevill's youngest son. But that wily author had burked the issue. She had wanted the book to be a happy one, and to have carried it to its logical conclusion would have made it unredeemed tragedy. She had therefore wound it up with a fine resounding major chord by making her last chapter the coming-out of young Elizabeth, Edward's eldest child. This avoided both the tragedy of Elizabeth's young brothers and the defeat and death of Richard in battle.

So the book ended with a Palace party, and a flushed and happy young Elizabeth, very magnificent in a new white dress and her first pearls, dancing the soles out of her slippers like the princesses in the fairy-tale. Richard and Anne, and their delicate little son, had come up from Middleham for the occasion. But neither George nor Isabel was there. Isabel had died in childbirth years ago, obscurely and as far as George was concerned unmourned. George too had died obscurely, but with that perverseness that was so peculiarly George's, had by that very obscurity won for himself imperishable fame.

George's life had been a progression from one spectacular piece of spiritual extravagance to the next. Each time, his family must have said: Well, that at last is the summit of frightfulness; even George cannot think of anything more fantastic than that. And each time George had surprised them. There was no limit to George's antic capacity.

The seed was perhaps sown when, during his first backsliding in the company of his father-in-law, Warwick had created him heir to the poor crazy puppet-King, Henry VI, whom Warwick had dumped back on the throne to spite his cousin Edward. Both Warwick's hopes of seeing his daughter a Queen and George's royal pretensions had gone down the drain on that night when Richard had gone over to the Lancastrian camp and talked to George. But the taste of importance had perhaps proved too much for a natural sweet-tooth. In the years to come the family were always heading George off from unexpected vagaries, or rescuing him from his latest caper.

When Isabel died he had been certain that she had been poisoned by her waiting-woman, and that his baby son had been poisoned by another. Edward, thinking the affair important enough to be tried before a London court, sent down a writ; only to find that George had tried them both at a petty sessions of his own magistrates and hanged them. The furious Edward, by way of rapping him over the knuckles, had two members of George's household tried for treason; but instead of taking the hint George declared that this was just judicial murder, and went about saying so in loud tones and a fine blaze of lèse-majesté.

Then he decided that he wanted to marry the richest heiress in Europe; who was Margaret's step-daughter, young Mary of Burgundy. Kind Margaret thought that it would be nice to have her brother in Burgundy, but Edward had arranged to back Maximilian of Austria's suit, and George was a continual embarrassment.

When the Burgundy intrigue came to nothing, the family hoped for a little peace. After all, George owned half the Nevill lands and had no need to marry again either for fortune or children. But George had a new scheme for marrying Margaret, the sister of James III of Scotland.

At last his *folie de grandeur* graduated from secret negotiation undertaken on his own behalf with foreign courts to open display of the Lancastrian Act of Parliament which had declared him heir to the throne after Henry VI. This, inevitably, landed him before another Parliament, and a much less amenable one.

The trial was chiefly remarkable for a flaming and wordy row between the two brothers Edward and George, but when the expected attainder was passed, there was a pause. Depriving George of his standing was one thing: desirable and indeed necessary. But executing him was something else again.

As the days went by without sentence being carried out, the Commons sent a reminder. And next day it was announced that George, Duke of Clarence, had died in the Tower.

Drowned in a butt of Malmsey, said London. And what was merely a Cockney's comment on a drunkard's end passed into history and made the undeserving George immortal.

So George was not at that party at Westminster, and the emphasis in Miss Payne-Ellis's final chapter was not Cecily Nevill as the mother of sons, but on Cecily Nevill the grandmother of a fine brood. George might have died discredited, on a dried-leaf heap of worn-out friendships, but his son, young Warwick, was a fine upstanding boy, and little Margaret at ten was already showing signs of the traditional Nevill beauty. Edmund, dead in battle at seventeen, might seem a wanton waste of young life, but there to balance it was the delicate baby whom she had never thought to rear; and he had a son to follow him. Richard in his twenties still looked as though one could break him in two, but he was as tough as a heather root, and perhaps his fragile-looking son would grow up to be as resilient. As for Edward, her tall blond Edward, his beauty might be blurring into grossness and his amiability into sloth, but his two small sons and his five girls had all the character and good looks of their combined ancestry.

As a grandmother she could look on that crowd of children with a personal pride, and as a Princess of England she could look on them with assurance. The crown was safe in the York line for generations to come.

If anyone, looking in a crystal ball at that party, had told Cecily Nevill that in four years not only the York line but the whole Plantagenet dynasty would have gone for ever, she would have held it to be either madness or treason.

But what Miss Payne-Ellis had not sought to gloss over was the prevalence of the Woodville clan in a Nevill-Plantagenet gathering.

She looked round the room and wished that her daughter-in-law Elizabeth had been blessed either with a less generous heart or with fewer relations. The Woodville match had turned out far more happily than anyone had dared to hope; Elizabeth had been an admirable wife; but the by-products had not been so fortunate. It was perhaps inevitable that the governorship of the two boys should have gone to her eldest brother; and Rivers, if a little nouveau riche in his liking for display and a little too obviously ambitious, was a cultured creature and an admirable person to have the boys in charge during their schoolroom days at Ludlow. But as for the rest: four brothers, seven sisters, and two sons by her first husband, were really too many by half to have brought into the marriage market in her wake.

Cecily looked across the laughing mêlée of the children's blind man's buff to the grownups standing round the supper table. Anne Woodville married to the Earl of Essex's heir. Eleanor Woodville married to the Earl of Kent's heir. Margaret Woodville married to the Earl of Arundel's heir. Catherine Woodville married to the Duke of Buckingham. Jacquette Woodville to Lord Strange. Mary Woodville to Lord Herbert's heir. And John Woodville, disgracefully, to the Dowager of Norfolk who was old enough to be his grandmother. It was good that new blood should strengthen the old families new blood had always seeped in but it was not good that it should come suddenly and in a flood from one particular source. It was like a fever in the political blood of the country; a foreign introduction, difficult to be assimilated. Unwise and regrettable.

However. There were long years ahead in which that influx could be assimilated. This new sudden power in the body politic would cease to be so concentrated, would spread out, would settle down, would cease to be dangerous and upsetting. Edward for all his amiability had a shrewd common sense; he would keep the country on an even keel as he had kept it for nearly twenty years. No one had run England with a more despotic power or a lighter hand than her acute, lazy, woman-loving Edward.

It would be all right eventually.

She was about to rise and join them in their discussion of sweetmeats they must not think that she was being critical or aloof when her granddaughter Elizabeth came breathless and laughing out of the scrimmage and swept into the seat beside her.

'I am much too old for this sort of thing,' she said between her gasps,'and it is ruinous to one's clothes. Do you like my dress, grandmother? I had to coax it out of Father. He said my old tawny satin would do. The one I had when Aunt Margaret came from Burgundy to visit us. That is the worst of having a father who notices what women wear. He knows too much about one's wardrobe. Did you hear that the Dauphin has jilted me? Father is in a pet, but I am so happy. I lighted ten candles to St Catherine. It took all I had left of my allowance. I don't want to leave England. I want never to leave England ever. Can you arrange that for me, grandmother?'

Cicely smiled and said that she would try.

'Old Ankaret, who tells fortunes, says that I am to be a Queen. But since there is no prince to marry me I do not see how that may be.' She paused, and added in a smaller voice: 'She said Queen of England. But I expect she was just a little tipsy. She is very fond of hippocras.'

It was unfair, not to say inartistic, of Miss Payne-Ellis to hint at Elizabeth's future as the wife of Henry VII if as author she was not prepared to face the unpleasantness that lay between. To presuppose in her readers a knowledge of Elizabeth's marriage to the first Tudor king, was also to presuppose their awareness of her brothers' murder. So that a dark reminding shadow fell across the festive scene with which she had chosen to end her story.

But on the whole, Grant thought, she had made a good enough job of the story, judging by what he had read of it. He might even go back sometime and read the bits he had skipped.

Grant had switched off his bedside light that night, and was half asleep, when a voice in his mind said: 'But Thomas More was Henry the Eighth.'

This brought him wide awake. He flicked the light on again.

What the voice had meant, of course, was not that Thomas More and Henry the Eighth were one and the same person, but that, in that business of putting personalities into pigeonholes according to reigns, Thomas More belonged to the reign of Henry the Eighth.

Grant lay looking at the pool of light that his lamp threw on the ceiling, and reckoned. If Thomas More was Henry VIII's Chancellor, then he must have lived through the whole of Henry VII's long reign as well as Richard III's. There was something wrong somewhere.

He reached for More's *History of Richard III*. It had as preface a short life of More which he had not bothered to read. Now he turned to it to find out how More could have been both Richard III's historian and Henry VIII's Chancellor. How old was More when Richard succeeded?

He was five.

When that dramatic council scene had taken place at the Tower, Thomas More had been five years old. He had been only eight when Richard died at Bosworth.

Everything in that history had been hearsay.

And if there was one word that a policeman loathed more than another it was hearsay. Especially when applied to evidence.

He was so disgusted that he flung the precious book on to the floor before he remembered that it was the property of a Public Library and his only by grace and for fourteen days.

More had never known Richard III at all. He had indeed grown up under a Tudor administration. That book was the Bible of the whole historical world on the subject of Richard III – it was from that account that Holinshed had taken his material, and from that that Shakespeare had written his and except that More believed what he wrote to be true it was of no more value than what the soldier said. It was what his cousin Laura called 'snow on their boots'. A 'gospel-true' event seen by someone other than the teller. That More had a critical mind and an admirable integrity did not make the story acceptable evidence. A great many otherwise admirable minds had accepted that story of the Russian troops passing through Britain. Grant had dealt too long with the human intelligence to accept as truth someone's report of someone's report of what that someone remembered to have seen or been told.

He was disgusted.

At the first opportunity he must get an actual contemporary account of the events of Richard's short reign. The Public Library could have Sir Thomas More back tomorrow and be damned to their fourteen days. The fact that Sir Thomas was a martyr and a Great Mind did not cut any ice at all with him, Alan Grant. He, Alan Grant, had known Great Minds so uncritical that they would believe a story that would make a con man blush for shame. He had known a great scientist who was convinced that a piece of butter muslin was his great-aunt Sophia because an illiterate medium from the back streets of Plymouth told him so. He had known a great authority on the Human Mind and Its Evolution who had been taken for all he had by an incurable knave because he 'judged for himself and not on police stories'. As far as he, Alan Grant, was concerned there was nothing so uncritical or so damn-silly as your Great Mind. As far as he, Alan Grant, was concerned Thomas More was washed out, cancelled, deleted; and he, Alan Grant, was beginning from scratch again tomorrow morning.

He was still illogically fuming when he fell asleep, and he woke fuming.

'Do you know that your Sir Thomas More knew nothing about Richard III at all?' he said, accusingly, to The Amazon the moment her large person appeared in the doorway.

She looked startled, not at his news but at his ferocity. Her eyes looked as if they might brim with tears at another rough word.

'But of course he knew!' she protested. 'He lived then.'

'He was eight when Richard died,' Grant said, relentless. 'And all he knew was what he had been told. Like me. Like you. Like Will Rogers of blessed memory. There is nothing hallowed at all about Sir Thomas More's history of Richard III. It's a damned piece of hearsay and a swindle.'

'Aren't you feeling so well this morning?' she asked anxiously. 'Do you think you've got a temperature?'

'I don't know about a temperature, but my blood pressure's away up.'

'Oh dear, dear,' she said, taking this literally. 'And you were doing so very well. Nurse Ingham will be so distressed. She has been boasting about your good recovery.'

That The Midget should have found him a subject for boasting was a new idea to Grant, but it was not one that gave him any gratification. He resolved to have a temperature in earnest if he could manage it, just to score off The Midget.

But the morning visit of Marta distracted him from this experiment in the power of mind over matter.

Marta, it seemed, was pluming herself on his mental health very much as The Midget was pluming herself on his physical improvement. She was delighted that her pokings-about with James in the print shop had been so effective.

'Have you decided on Perkin Warbeck, then?' she asked.

'No. Not Warbeck. Tell me: what made you bring me a portrait of Richard III? There's no mystery about Richard, is there?'

'No. I suppose we took it as illustration to the Warbeck story. No, wait a moment. I remember. James turned it up and said: "If he's mad about faces, there's one for him!" He said: "That's the most notorious murderer in history, and yet his face is in my estimation the face of a saint".'

'A saint!' Grant said; and then remembered something."Over-conscientious",' he said.

'What?'

'Nothing. I was just remembering my first impressions of it. Is that how it seemed to you: the face of a saint?'

She looked across at the picture, propped up against the pile of books. 'I can't see it against the light,' she said, and picked it up for a closer scrutiny.

He was suddenly reminded that to Marta, as to Sergeant Williams, faces were a professional matter. The slant of an eyebrow, the set of a mouth, was just as much an evidence of character to Marta as to Williams. Indeed she actually made herself faces to match the characters she played.

'Nurse Ingham thinks he's a dreary. Nurse Darroll thinks he's a horror. My surgeon thinks he's a polio victim. Sergeant Williams thinks he's a born judge. Matron thinks he's a soul in torment.'

Marta said nothing for a little while. Then she said: 'It's odd, you know. When you first look at it you think it a mean, suspicious face. Even cantankerous. But when you look at it a little longer you find that it isn't like that at all. It is quite calm. It is really quite a gentle face, perhaps that is what James meant by being saint-like.'

'No. No, I don't think so. What he meant was the - subservience to conscience.'

'Whatever it is, it is a *face*, isn't it! Not just a collection of organs for seeing, breathing, and eating with. A wonderful face. With very little alteration, you know, it might be a portrait of Lorenzo the Magnificent.'

'You don't suppose that it is Lorenzo and that we're considering the wrong man altogether?'

'Of course not. Why should you think that?'

'Because nothing in the face fits the facts of history. And pictures have got shuffled before now.'

'Oh, yes, of course they have. But that is Richard all right. The original – or what is supposed to be the original is at Windsor Castle. James told me. It is included in Henry VIII's inventory, so it has been there for four hundred years or so. And there are duplicates at Hatfield and Albury.'

'It's Richard,' Grant said resignedly. 'I just don't know anything about faces. Do you know anyone at the B.M.?'

'At the British Museum?' Marta asked, her attention still on the portrait. 'No, I don't think so. Not that I can think of at the moment. I went there once to look at some Egyptian Jewellery, when I was playing Cleopatra with Geoffrey – did you ever see Geoffrey's Antony? it was superlatively genteel but the place frightens me rather. Such a garnering of the ages. It made me feel the way the stars make you feel: small and no-account. What do you want of the B.M.?'

'I wanted some information about history written in Richard III's day. Contemporary accounts.'

'Isn't the sainted Sir Thomas any good, then?'

'The sainted Sir Thomas is nothing but an old gossip,' Grant said with venom. He had taken a wild dislike to the much-admired More.

'Oh, dear. And the nice man at the Library seemed so reverent about him. The Gospel of Richard III according to St Thomas More, and all that.'

'Gospel nothing,' Grant said rudely. 'He was writing down in a Tudor England what someone had told him about events that happened in a Plantagenet England when he himself was five.'

'Five years old?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, dear. Not exactly the horse's mouth.'

'Not even straight from the course. Come to think of it, it's as reliable as a bookie's tips would be. He's on the wrong side of the rails altogether. If he was a Tudor servant he was on the laying side where Richard III was concerned.'

'Yes, Yes, I suppose so. What do you want to find out about Richard, when there is no mystery to investigate?'

'I want to know what made him tick. That is a more profound mystery than anything I have come up against of late. What changed him almost overnight? Up to the moment of his late brother's death he seems to have been entirely admirable. And devoted to his brother.'

'I suppose the supreme honour must always be a temptation.'

'He was Regent until the boy came of age, protector of England. With his previous history, you would think that would have been enough for him. You would have thought, indeed, that it would have been very much his cup of tea: guardian of both Edward's son and the kingdom.'

'Perhaps the brat was unbearable, and Richard longed to "larn" him. Isn't it odd how we never think of victims as anything but white innocents. Like Joseph in the Bible. I'm sure he was a quite intolerable young man, actually, and long

overdue for that pushing into the pit. Perhaps young Edward was just sitting up and begging to be quietly put down.'

'There were two of them,' Grant reminded her.

'Yes, of course. Of course there isn't an explanation. It was the ultimate barbarism. Poor little woolly lambs! Oh!'

'What was the "Oh" for?'

'I've just thought of something. Woolly lambs made me think of it.'

'Well?'

'No, I won't tell you in case it doesn't come off. I must fly.'

'Have you charmed Madeleine March into agreeing to write the play?'

'Well, she hasn't actually signed a contract yet, but I think she is sold on the idea. *Au revoir*, my dear. I shall look in soon again.'

She went away, sped on her way by a blushing Amazon, and Grant did not remember anything about woolly lambs until the woolly lamb actually turned up in his room next evening. The woolly lamb was wearing horn-rimmed spectacles, which in some odd way emphasised the resemblance instead of detracting from it. Grant had been dozing, more at peace with the world than he had been for some time; history was, as Matron had pointed out, an excellent way of acquiring a sense of perspective. The tap at his door was so tentative that he had decided that he had imagined it. Taps on hospital doors are not apt to be tentative. But something made him say: 'Come in!' and there in the opening was something that was so unmistakably Marta's woolly lamb that Grant laughed aloud before he could stop himself.

The young man looked abashed, smiled nervously, propped the spectacles on his nose with a long thin forefinger, cleared his throat, and said:

'Mr Grant? My name is Carradine. Brent Carradine. I hope I haven't disturbed you when you were resting.'

'No, no. Come in, Mr Carradine. I am delighted to see you.'

'Marta - Miss Hallard, that is - sent me. She said I could be of some help to you.'

'Did she say how? Do sit down. You'll find a chair over there behind the door. Bring it over.'

He was a tall boy, hatless, with soft fair curls crowning a high forehead and a much too big tweed coat hanging unfastened round him in negligent folds, American-wise. Indeed, it was obvious that he was in fact American. He brought over the chair, planted himself on it with the coat spread round him like some royal robe and looked at Grant with kind brown eyes whose luminous charm not even the horn-rims could dim.

'Marta - Miss Hallard, that is - said that you wanted something looked up.'

'And are you a looker-upper?'

'I'm doing research, here in London. Historical research, I mean. And she said something about your wanting something in that line. She knows I work at the B.M. most mornings. I'd be very pleased, Mr Grant, to do anything I can to help you.'

'That's very kind of you; very kind indeed. What is it that you are working on? Your research, I mean.'

'The Peasants' Revolt.'

'Oh. Richard II.'

'Yes.'

'Are you interested in social conditions?'

The young man grinned suddenly in a very unstudent-like way and said: 'No, I'm interested in staying in England.'

'And can't you stay in England without doing research?'

'Not very easily. I've got to have an alibi. My pop thinks I should go into the family business. It's furniture. Wholesale furniture. You order it by mail. Out of a book. Don't misunderstand me, Mr Grant; it's very good furniture. Lasts for ever. It's just that I can't take much interest in furnishing-units.'

'And, short of Polar exploration, the British Museum was the best hideaway you could think of.'

'Well, it's warm. And I really do like history. I majored in it. And well, Mr Grant, if you really want to know, I just had to follow Atlanta Shergold to England. She's the dumb blonde in Marta's I mean: in Miss Hallard's play. I mean she plays the dumb blonde. She's not at all dumb, Atlanta.'

'No, indeed. A very gifted young woman indeed.'

'You've seen her?'

'I shouldn't think there is anyone in London who hasn't seen her.'

'No, I suppose not. It does go on and on, doesn't it. We didn't think – Atlanta and me – that it would run for more than a few weeks, so we just waved each other goodbye and said: See you at the beginning of the month! It was when we found that it was going on indefinitely that I just had to find an excuse to come to England.'

'Wasn't Atlanta sufficient excuse?'

'Not for my pop! The family are very snooty about Atlanta, but Pop is the worst of the bunch. When he can bring himself to mention her he refers to her as "that young actress acquaintance of yours." You see, Pop is Carradine the Third, and Atlanta's father is very much Shergold the First. A little grocery store on Main Street, as a matter of fact. And the salt of the earth, in case you're interested. And of course Atlanta hadn't really done very much, back in the States. I mean, on the stage. This is her first big success. That is why she didn't want to break her contract and come back home. As a matter of fact it'll be quite a fight to get her back home at all. She says we never appreciated her.'

'So you took to research.'

'I had to think of something that I could do only in London, you see. And I had done some research at college. So the B.M. seemed to be what you call my cup of tea. I could enjoy myself and yet show my father that I was really working, both at the same time.'

'Yes. It's as a nice an alibi as ever I met with. Why the Peasants' Revolt, by the way?'

'Well, it's an interesting time. And I thought it would please Pop.'

'Is he interested in social reform, then?'

'No, but he hates kings,'

'Carradine the Third?'

'Yes, it's a laugh, isn't it. I wouldn't put it past him to have a crown in one of his safe-deposit boxes. I bet he takes out the parcel every now and then and sneaks over to Grand Central and tries it on in the men's washroom. I'm afraid I'm tiring you, Mr Grant; gabbing on about my own affairs like this. I didn't come for that. I came to –'

'Whatever you came for, you're manna straight from heaven. So relax, if you're not in a hurry.'

'I'm never in a hurry,' the young man said, unfolding his legs and laying them out in front of him. As he did it his feet, at the far extremity of his long limbs, touched the bedside table and shook the portrait of Richard III from its precarious position, so that it dropped to the floor.

'Oh, pardon me! That was careless of me. I haven't really got used to the length of my legs yet. You'd think a fellow would be used to his growth by twenty-two, wouldn't you.' He picked up the photograph, dusted it carefully with the cuff of his sleeve, and looked at it with interest. 'Richardus III. Ang. Rex.,' he read aloud.

'You're the first person to have noticed that background writing,' Grant said.

'Well, I suppose it isn't visible unless you look into it. You're the first person I ever met who had a king for a pin-up.'

'No beauty, is he.'

'I don't know,' said the boy slowly. 'It's not a bad face, as faces go. I had a prof. at college who looked rather like him. He lived on bismuth and glasses of milk so he had a slightly jaundiced outlook on life, but he was the kindest creature imaginable. Is it about Richard that you wanted information?'

'Yes. Nothing very abstruse or difficult. Just to know what the contemporary authority is.'

'Well, that should be easy enough. It isn't very far from my own time. I mean my research period. Indeed, the modern authority for Richard II – Sir Cuthbert Oliphant – stretches over both. Have you read Oliphant?' Grant said that he had read nothing but schoolbooks and Sir Thomas More.

'More? Henry VIII's Chancellor?'

'Yes.'

'I take it that that was a bit of special pleading!'

'It read to me more like a party pamphlet,' Grant said, realising for the first time that that was the taste that had been left in his mouth. It had not read like a statesman's account; it had read like a party throwaway.

No, it had read like a columnist. Like a columnist who got his information below-stairs.

'Do you know anything about Richard III?'

'Nothing except that he croaked his nephews, and offered his kingdom for a horse. And that he had two stooges known as the Cat and the Rat.'

'What!

'You know: "The Cat, the Rat, and Lovel Our Dog, Rule all England under a Hog".'

'Yes of course. I'd forgotten that. What does it mean, do you know?'

'No, I've no idea. I don't know that period very well. How did you get interested in Richard III?'

'Marta suggested that I should do some academic investigating, since I can't do any practical investigating for some time to come. And because I find faces interesting she brought me portraits of all the principals. Principals in the various mysteries she suggested, I mean. Richard got in more or less by accident, but he proved the biggest mystery of the lot.'

'He did? In what way?'

'He is the author of the most revolting crime in history, and he has the face of a great judge; a great administrator. Moreover he was by all accounts an abnormally civilised and well-living creature. He actually was a good administrator, by the way. He governed the North of England and did it excellently. He was a good staff officer and a good soldier. And nothing is known against his private life. His brother, perhaps you know, was – bar Charles II – our most wench-ridden royal product.'

'Edward IV. Yes, I know. A six-foot hunk of male beauty. Perhaps Richard suffered from a resentment at the contrast. And that accounts for his willingness to blot out his brother's seed.'

This was something that Grant had not thought of.

'You're suggesting that Richard had a suppressed hate for his brother?'

'Why suppressed?'

'Because even his worst detractors admit that he was devoted to Edward. They were together in everything from the time that Richard was twelve or thirteen. The other brother was no good to anyone. George.'

'Who was George?'

'The Duke of Clarence.'

'Oh. Him! Butt-of-malmsey Clarence.'

'That's the one. So there were just the two of them Edward and Richard I mean. And there was a ten-year gap in their ages. Just the right difference for hero-worship.'

'If I were a hunchback,' young Carradine said musingly, 'I sure would hate a brother who took my credit and my women and my place in the sun.'

'It's possible,' Grant said after an interval. 'It's the best explanation I've come on so far.'

'It mightn't have been an overt thing at all, you know. It mightn't have even been a conscious thing. It may just have all boiled up in him when he saw the chance of a crown. He may have said – I mean his blood may have said: "Here's my chance! All those years of fetching and carrying and standing one pace in the rear, and no thanks for them. Here's where I take my pay. Here's where I settle accounts".'

Grant noticed that by sheer chance Carradine had used the same imagined description of Richard as Miss Payne-Ellis. Standing one pace in the rear. That is how the novelist had seen him, standing with the fair, solid Margaret and George, on the steps of Baynard's Castle watching their father go away to war. One pace in the rear, 'as usual'.

'That's very interesting, though, what you say about Richard being apparently a good sort up to the time of the crime,' Carradine said, propping one leg of his horn-rims with a long forefinger in his characteristic gesture. 'Makes him more of a person. That Shakespeare version of him, you know, that's just a caricature. Not a man at all. I'll be very pleased to do any investigating you want, Mr Grant. It'll make a nice change from the peasants.'

'The Cat and the Rat instead of John Ball and Wat Tyler.'

'That's it.'

'Well, it's very nice of you. I'd be glad of anything you can rake up. But at the moment all I pine for is a contemporary account of events. They must have been country-rocking events. I want to read a contemporary's account of them. Not what someone heard-tell about events that happened when he was five, and under another regime altogether.'

'I'll find out who the contemporary historian is. Fabyan, perhaps. Or is he Henry VII? Anyway, I'll find out. And meanwhile perhaps you'd like a look at Oliphant. He's the modern authority on the period, or so I understand.'

Grant said that he would be delighted to take a look at Sir Cuthbert.

'I'll drop him in when I'm passing tomorrow – I suppose it'll be all right if I leave him in the office for you? and as soon as I find out about the contemporary writers I'll be in with the news. That suit you?'

Grant said that that was perfect.

Young Carradine went suddenly shy, reminding Grant of the woolly lamb which he had quite forgotten in the interest of this new approach to Richard. He said good night in a quiet smothered way, and ambled out of the room followed by the sweeping skirts of his topcoat.

Grant thought that, the Carradine fortune apart, Atlanta Shergold looked like being on a good thing.

'Well,' said Marta when she came again, 'what did you think of my woolly lamb?'

'It was very kind of you to find him for me.'

'I didn't have to find him. He's continually underfoot. He practically lives at the theatre. He must have seen *To Sea in a Bowl* five hundred times; when he isn't in Atlanta's dressing-room he's in front. I wish they'd get married, and then we might see less of him. (They're not even living together, you know. It's all pure idyll.') She dropped her 'actress' voice for a moment and said: 'They're rather sweet together. In some ways they are more like twins than lovers. They have that utter trust in each other; that dependence on the other half to make a proper whole. And they never have rows or even quarrels, that I can see. An idyll, as I said. Was it Brent who brought you this?'

She poked the solid bulk of Oliphant with a doubtful finger.

'Yes, he left it with the porter for me.'

'It looks very indigestible.'

'A bit unappetising, let us say. It is quite easily digested once you have swallowed it. History for the student. Set out in detailed fact.'

'Ugh!'

'At least I've discovered where the revered and sainted Sir Thomas More got his account of Richard.'

'Yes? Where?'

'From one John Morton.'

'Never heard of him.'

'Neither did I, but that's our ignorance.'

'Who was he?'

'He was Henry VII's Archbishop of Canterbury. And Richard's bitterest enemy.'

If Marta had been capable of whistling, she would have whistled in comment.

'So that was the horse's mouth!' she said.

'That was the horse's mouth. And it is on that account of Richard that all the later ones were built. It is on that story that Holinshed fashioned his history, and on that story that Shakespeare fashioned his character.'

'So it is the version of someone who hated Richard. I didn't know that. Why did the sainted Sir Thomas report Morton rather than someone else?'

'Whoever he reported, it would be a Tudor version. But he reported Morton, it seems, because he had been in Morton's household as a boy. And of course Morton had been very much "in on the act", so it was natural to write down the version of an eyewitness whose account he could have at first hand.'

Marta poked her finger at Oliphant again. 'Does your dull fat historian acknowledge that it is a biased version?'

'Oliphant? Only by implication. He is, to be honest, in a sad muddle himself about Richard. On the same page he says that he was an admirable administrator and general, with an excellent reputation, staid and good-living, very popular by contrast with the Woodville upstarts (the Queen's relations) and that he was "perfectly unscrupulous and ready to wade through any depth of bloodshed to the crown which lay within his grasp". On one page he says grudgingly: "There are reasons for supposing that he was not destitute of a conscience" and then on a later page reports More's picture of a man so tormented by his own deed that he could not sleep. And so on.'

'Does your dull fat Oliphant prefer his roses red, then?'

'Oh, I don't think so. I don't think he is consciously Lancastrian. Though now that I think of it he is very tolerant of Henry VIIs usurpation. I can't remember his saying anywhere, brutally, that Henry hadn't a vestige of a shadow of a claim to the throne.'

'Who put him there, then? Henry, I mean.'

'The Lancastrian remnant and the upstart Woodvilles, backed, I suppose, by a country revolted by the boys' murder. Apparently anyone with a spice of Lancastrian blood in their veins would do. Henry himself was canny enough to put "conquest" first in his claim to the throne, and his Lancaster blood second. "De jure belli et de jure Lancastriae." His mother was the heir of an illegitimate son of the third son of Edward III.'

'All I know about Henry VII is that he was fantastically rich and fantastically mean. Do you know the lovely Kipling story about his knighting the craftsman not for having done beautiful work but for having saved him the cost of some scrollwork?'

'With a rusty sword from behind the arras. You must be one of the few women who know their Kipling.'

'Oh, I'm a very remarkable woman in many ways. So you are no nearer finding out about Richard's personality than you were?'

'No. I'm as completely bewildered as Sir Cuthbert Oliphant, bless his heart. The only difference between us is that I know I'm bewildered and he doesn't seem to be aware of it.

'Have you seen much of my woolly lamb?'

'I've seen nothing of him since his first visit, and that's three days ago. I'm beginning to wonder whether he has repented of his promise.'

'Oh, no. I'm sure not. Faithfulness is his banner and creed.'

'Like Richard.'

'Richard?'

'His motto was: "Loyaulté me lie". Loyalty binds me.'

There was a tentative tap at the door, and in answer to Grant's invitation, Brent Carradine appeared, hung around with topcoat as usual.

'Oh! I seem to be butting in. I didn't know you were here, Miss Hallard. I met the Statue of Liberty in the corridor there, and she seemed to think you were alone, Mr Grant.'

Grant identified the Statue of Liberty without difficulty. Marta said that she was in the act of going, and that in any case Brent was a much more welcome visitor than she was nowadays. She would leave them in peace to pursue their search for the soul of a murderer.

When he had bowed her politely to the door Brent came back and sat himself down in the visitor's chair with exactly the same air that an Englishman wears when he sits down to his port after the women have left the table. Grant wondered if even the female-ridden American felt a subconscious relief at settling down to a stag party. In answer to Brent's inquiry as to how he was getting on with Oliphant, he said he found Sir Cuthbert admirably lucid.

'I've discovered who the Cat and the Rat were, incidentally. They were entirely respectable knights of the realm: William Catesby and Richard Ratcliffe. Catesby was Speaker of the House of Commons, and Ratcliffe was one of the Commissioners of Peace with Scotland. Its odd how the very sound of words makes a political jingle vicious. The Hog of course was Richard's badge. The White Boar. Do you frequent our English pubs?'

'Sure. They're one of the things I think you do better than us.'

'You forgive us our plumbing for the sake of the beer at the Boar.'

'I wouldn't go as far as to say I forgive it. I discount it, shall we say.'

'Magnanimous of you. Well, there's something else you've got to discount. That theory of yours that Richard hated his brother because of the contrast between his beauty and Richard's hunchbacked state. According to Sir Cuthbert, the hunchback is a myth. So is the withered arm. It appears that he had no visible deformity. At least none that mattered. His left shoulder was lower than his right, that was all. Did you find out who the contemporary historian is?'

'There isn't one.'

'None at all?'

Not in the sense that you mean it. There were writers who were contemporaries of Richard, but they wrote after his death. For the Tudors. Which puts them out of court. There is a monkish chronicle in Latin somewhere that is contemporary, but I haven't been able to get hold of it yet. One thing I have discovered though: that account of Richard III is called Sir Thomas More's not because he wrote it but because the manuscript was found among his papers. It was an unfinished copy of an account that appears elsewhere in finished form.'

'Well!' Grant considered this with interest. 'You mean it was More's own manuscript copy?'

'Yes. In his own writing. Made when he was 'bout thirty-five. In those days, before printing was general, manuscript copies of books were the usual thing.'

'Yes. So, if the information came from John Morton, as it did, it is just as likely that the thing was written by Morton.'

'Yes.'

'Which would certainly account for the – the lack of sensibility. A climber like Morton wouldn't be at all abashed by back-stairs gossip. Do you know about Morton?'

'No.

'He was a lawyer turned churchman, and the greatest pluralist on record. He chose the Lancastrians side and stayed with it until it was clear that Edward IV was home and dried. Then he made his peace with the York side and Edward made him Bishop of Ely. And vicar of God knows how many parishes besides. But after Richard's accession he backed first the Woodvilles and then Henry Tudor and ended up with a cardinal's hat as Henry VII's Archbishop of —'

'Wait a minute!' said the boy, amused. 'Of *course* I know Morton. He was Morton of "Morton's Fork". "You can't be spending much so how about something for the King; you're spending such a lot you must be very rich so how about something for the King?"

'Yes. That Morton. Henry's best thumbscrew. And I've just thought of a reason why he might have a personal hatred for Richard long before the murder of the boys.'

'Yes?'

'Edward took a large bribe from Louis XI to make a dishonourable peace in France. Richard was very angry about that — it really was a disgraceful affair — and washed his hands of the business. Which included refusing a large cash offer. But Morton was very much in favour both of the deal and the cash. Indeed he took a pension from Louis. A very nice pension it was. Two thousand crowns a year. I don't suppose Richard's outspoken comments went down very well, even with good gold for a chaser.'

'No. I guess not.'

'And of course there would be no preferment for Morton under the straight-laced Richard as there had been under the easy-going Edward. So he would have taken the Woodville side, even if there had been no murder.'

'About that murder -' the boy said; and paused.

'Yes?

'About the murder the murder of those two boys - isn't it odd that no one talks of it?'

'How do you mean: no one talks of it?'

'These last three days I've been going through contemporary papers: letters and what not. And no one mentions them at all.'

'Perhaps they were afraid to. It was a time when it paid to be discreet.'

'Yes: but I'll tell you something even odder. You know that Henry brought a Bill of Attainder against Richard, after Bosworth. Before Parliament. I mean. Well, he accuses Richard of cruelty and tyranny but doesn't even mention the murder.'

'What!' said Grant, startled.

'Yes, you may look startled.'

'Are you sure?'

'Quite sure.'

'But Henry got possession of the Tower immediately on his arrival in London after Bosworth. If the boys were missing it is incredible that he should not publish the fact immediately. It was the trump card in his hand.' He lay in surprised silence for a little, The sparrows on the window-sill quarrelled loudly. 'I can't make sense of it.' he said. 'What possible explanation can there be for his omission to make capital out of the fact that the boys were missing?'

Brent shifted his long legs to a more comfortable position. 'There is only one explanation,' he said. 'And that is that the boys weren't missing.'

There was a still longer silence this time, while they stared at each other.

'Oh, no, it's nonsense,' Grant said. 'There must be some obvious explanation that we are failing to see.'

'As what, for instance?'

'I don't know. I haven't had time to think.'

'I've had nearly three days to think, and I still haven't thought up a reason that will fit. *Nothing* will fit the facts except the conclusion that the boys were alive when Henry took over the Tower. It was a completely unscrupulous Act of Attainder; it accused Richard's followers – the loyal followers of an anointed King fighting against an invader – of treason. Every accusation that Henry could possibly make with any hope of getting away with it was put into that Bill. And the very worst he could accuse Richard of was the usual cruelty and tyranny. The boys aren't even mentioned.'

'It's fantastic.'

'It's unbelievable. But it is fact.'

'What it means is that there was no contemporary accusation at all.'

'That's about it.'

'But but wait a minute. Tyrrel was hanged for the murder. He actually confessed to it before he died. Wait a minute.' He reached for Oliphant and sped through the pages looking for the place. 'There's a full account of it here somewhere. There was no mystery about it. Even the Statue of Liberty knew about it.'

'Who?'

'The nurse you met in the corridor. It was Tyrrel who committed the murder and he was found guilty and confessed before his death.'

Was that when Henry took over in London, then?'

'Wait a moment. Here it is.' He skimmed down the paragraph. 'No, it was in 1502.' He realised all of a sudden what he had just said, and repeated in a new, bewildered tone: In - 1502.'

'But - but - but that was -'

'Yes. Nearly twenty years afterwards.'

Brent fumbled for his cigarette case, took it out, and then put it hastily away again.

'Smoke if you like,' Grant said. 'It's a good stiff drink I need. I don't think my brain can be working very well. I feel the way I used to feel as a child when I was blindfolded and whirled round before beginning a blindman's-buff game.'

'Yes,' said Carradine. He took out a cigarette and lighted it. 'Completely in the dark, and more than a little dizzy.'

He sat staring at the sparrows.

'Forty million schoolbooks can't be wrong,' Grant said after a little.

'Can't they?'

'Well, can they!'

'I used to think so, but I'm not so sure nowadays.'

'Aren't you being a little sudden in your scepticism?'

'Oh, it wasn't this that shook me.'

'What then?'

'A little affair called the Boston Massacre. Ever heard of it?'

'Of course.'

'Well, I discovered quite by accident, when I was looking up something at college, that the Boston Massacre consisted of a mob throwing stones at a sentry. The total casualties were four. I was brought up on the Boston Massacre, Mr Grant. My twenty-eight-inch chest used to swell at the very memory of it. My good red spinach-laden blood used to seethe at the thought of helpless civilians mowed down by the fire of British troops. You can't imagine what a shock it was to find that all it added up to in actual fact was a brawl that wouldn't get more than local reporting in a clash between police and strikers in any American lock-out.'

As Grant made no reply to this, he squinted his eyes against the light to see how Grant was taking it. But Grant was staring at the ceiling as if he were watching patterns forming there.

'That's partly why I like to research so much,' Carradine volunteered; and settled back to staring at the sparrows.

Presently Grant put his hand out, wordlessly, and Carradine gave him a cigarette and lighted it for him.

They smoked in silence.

It was Grant who interrupted the sparrows' performance.

'Tonypandy,' he said.

'How's that?'

But Grant was still far away.

'After all, I've seen the thing at work in my own day, haven't I,' he said, not to Carradine but to the ceiling. 'It's Tonypandy.'

'And what in heck is Tonypandy?' Brent asked. 'It sounds like a patent medicine. Does your child get out of sorts? Does the little face get flushed, the temper short, and the limbs easily tired? Give the little one Tonypandy, and see the radiant results.' And then, as Grant made no answer: 'All right, then; keep your Tonypandy. I wouldn't have it as a gift.'

'Tonypandy,' Grant said, still in that sleepwalking voice, 'is a place in the south of Wales.'

'I knew it was some kind of physic.'

'If you go to South Wales you will hear that, in 1910, the Government used troops to shoot down Welsh miners who were striking for their rights. You'll probably hear that Winston Churchill, who was Home Secretary at the time, was responsible. South Wales, you will be told, will never forget Tonypandy!'

Carradine had dropped his flippant air.

'And it wasn't a bit like that?'

'The actual facts are these. The rougher section of the Rhondda valley crowd had got quite out of hand. Shops were being looted and property destroyed. The Chief Constable of Glamorgan sent a request to the Home Office for troops to protect the lieges. If a Chief Constable thinks a situation serious enough to ask for the help of the military a Home Secretary has very little choice in the matter. But Churchill was so horrified at the possibility of the troops coming face to face with a crowd of rioters and having to fire on them, that he stopped the movement of the troops and sent instead a body of plain, solid Metropolitan Police, armed with nothing but their rolled-up mackintoshes. The troops were kept in reserve, and all contact with the rioters was made by unarmed London police. The only bloodshed in the whole affair was a bloody nose or two. The Home Secretary was severely criticised in the House of Commons incidentally for his "unprecedented intervention". That was Tonypandy. That is the shooting-down by troops that Wales will never forget.'

'Yes,' Carradine said, considering. 'Yes. It's almost a parallel to the Boston affair. Someone blowing up a simple affair to huge proportions for a political end.'

'The point is not that it is a parallel. The point is that *every single man* who was there knows that the story is nonsense, and yet it has never been contradicted. It will never be overtaken now. It is a completely untrue story grown to legend while the men who knew it to be untrue looked on and said nothing.'

'Yes. That's very interesting; very. History as it is made.'

'Yes. History.

'Give me research. After all, the truth of anything at all doesn't lie in someone's account of it. It lies in all the small facts of the time. An advertisement in a paper. The sale of a house. The price of a ring.'

Grant went on looking at the ceiling, and the sparrows' clamour came back into the room.

'What amuses you?' Grant said, turning his head at last and catching the expression on his visitor's face.

'This is the first time I've seen you look like a policeman.'

'I'm feeling like a policeman. I'm thinking like a policeman. I'm asking myself the question that every policeman asks in every case of murder: Who benefits? And for the first time it occurs to me that the glib theory that Richard got rid of the boys to make himself safer on the throne is so much nonsense. Supposing he had got rid of the boys. There were still the boys' five sisters between him and the throne. To say nothing of George's two: the boy and girl. George's son and daughter were barred by their father's attainder; but I take it that an attainder can be reversed, or annulled, or something. If Richard's claim was shaky, all those lives stood between him and safety.'

'And did they all survive him?'

'I don't know. But I shall make it my business to find out. The boys' eldest sister certainly did because she became Queen of England as Henry's wife.'

'Look, Mr Grant, let's you and I start at the very beginning of this thing. Without history books, or modern versions, or anyone's opinion about anything. Truth isn't in accounts but in account books.'

'A neat phrase,' Grant said, complimentary. 'Does it mean anything?'

'It means everything. The real history is written in forms not meant as history. In Wardrobe accounts, in Privy Purse expenses, in personal letters, in estate books. If someone, say, insists that Lady Whoosit never had a child, and you find in the account book the entry: "For the son born to my lady on Michaelmas eve: five yards of blue ribbon, fourpence halfpenny" it's a reasonably fair deduction that my lady had a son on Michaelmas eve.'

'Yes. I see. All right, where do we begin?'

'You're the investigator. I'm only the looker-upper.'

'Research Worker.'

'Thanks. What do you want to know?'

'Well, for a start, it would be useful, not to say enlightening, to know how the principals in the case reacted to Edward's death. Edward IV, I mean. Edward died unexpectedly, and his death must have caught everyone on the hop. I'd like to know how the people concerned reacted.'

'That's straight forward and easy. I take it you mean what they did and not what they thought.'

'Yes, of course,'

'Only historians tell you what they thought. Research Workers stick to what they did.'

'What they did is all I want to know. I've always been a believer in the old saw that actions speak louder than words.'

'Incidentally, what does the sainted Sir Thomas say that Richard did when he heard that his brother was dead?' Brent wanted to know.

'The sainted Sir Thomas (alias John Morton) says that Richard got busy being charming to the Queen and persuading her not to send a large bodyguard to escort the boy prince from Ludlow; meanwhile cooking up a plot to kidnap the boy on his way to London.'

'According to the sainted More, then, Richard meant from the very first to supplant the boy,'

'Oh, yes.'

'Well, we shall find out, at least, who was where and doing what, whether we can deduce their intentions or not.'

'That's what I want. Exactly.'

'Policeman!' jibed the boy. "'Where were you at five p.m. on the night of the fifteenth inst?"

'It works,' Grant assured him. 'It works.'

'Well, I'll go away and work too. I'll be in again as soon as I have got the information you want. I'm very grateful to you, Mr Grant. This is a lot better than the Peasants.'

He floated away into the gathering dusk of the winter afternoon, his train-like coat giving an academic sweep and dignity to his thin young figure.

Grant switched on his lamp, and examined the pattern it made on the ceiling as if he had never seen it before.

It was a unique and engaging problem that the boy had dropped so casually into his lap. As unexpected as it was baffling.

What possible reason could there be for that lack of contemporary accusation?

Henry had not even needed proof that Richard was himself responsible. The boys were in Richard's care. If they were not to be found when the Tower was taken over, then that was far finer, thicker mud to throw at his dead rival than the routine accusations of cruelty and tyranny.

Grant ate his supper without for one moment being conscious either of its taste or its nature.

It was only when The Amazon, taking away his tray, said kindly: 'Come now, that's a very good sign. Both rissoles all eaten up to the last crumb!' that he became aware that he had partaken of a meal.

For another hour he watched the lamp-pattern on the ceiling, going over the thing in his mind; going round and round it looking for some small crack that might indicate a way into the heart of the matter.

In the end he withdrew his attention altogether from the problem, which was his habit when a conundrum proved too round and smooth and solid for immediate solution. If he slept on the proposition it might, tomorrow, show a facet that he had missed.

He looked for something that might stop his mind from harking back to that Act of Attainder, and saw the pile of letters waiting to be acknowledged. Kind, well-wishing letters from all sorts of people; including a few old lags. The really likable old lags were an outmoded type, growing fewer and fewer daily. Their place had been taken by brash young thugs with not a spark of humanity in their egocentric souls, as illiterate as puppies and as pitiless as a circular saw. The old professional burglar was apt to be as individual as the member of any other profession, and as little vicious. Quiet little domestic men, interested in family holidays and the children's tonsils; or odd bachelors devoted to cage-birds, or second-hand bookshops, or complicated and infallible betting systems. Old-fashioned types.

No modern thug would write to say that he was sorry that a 'busy' was laid aside. No such idea would ever cross a modern thug's mind.

Writing a letter when lying on one's back is a laborious business, and Grant shied away from it. But the top envelope on the pile bore the writing of his cousin Laura, and Laura would become anxious if she had no answer at all from him. Laura and he had shared summer holidays as children, and had been a little in love with each other all through one Highland summer, and that made a bond between them that had never been broken. He had better send Laura a note to say that he was alive.

He read her letter again, smiling a little; and the waters of the Turlie sounded in his ears and slid under his eyes, and he could smell the sweet cold smell of a Highland moor in winter, and he forgot for a little that he was a hospital patient and that life was sordid and boring and claustrophobic.

Pat sends what would be his love if he were a little older or just a little younger. Being nine, he says: 'Tell Alan I was asking for him', and has a fly of his own invention waiting to be presented to you when you come on sick-leave. He is a little in disgrace at the moment in school, having learned for the first time that the Scots sold Charles the First to the English and having decided that he can no longer belong to such a nation. He is therefore, I understand, conducting a one-man protest strike against all things Scottish, and will learn no history, sing no song, nor memorise any geography pertaining to so deplorable a country. He announced going to bed last night that he has decided to apply for Norwegian citizenship. Grant took his letter pad from the table and wrote in pencil:

Dearest Laura,

Would you be unbearably surprised to learn that the Princes in the Tower survived Richard III?

As ever

Alan

P.S. I am nearly well again.

'Do you know that the Bill attainting Richard III before Parliament didn't mention the murder of the Princes in the Tower?' Grant asked the surgeon next morning.

'Really?' said the surgeon. 'That's odd, isn't it?'

'Extremely odd. Can you think of an explanation?'

'Probably trying to minimise the scandal. For the sake of the family.'

'He wasn't succeeded by one of his family. He was the last of his line. His successor was the first Tudor. Henry VII.'

'Yes, of course. I'd forgotten. I was never any good at history. I used to use the history period to do my home algebra. They don't manage to make history very interesting in schools. Perhaps more portraits might help.' He glanced up at the Richard portrait and went back to his professional inspection. 'That is looking very nice and healthy, I'm glad to say. No pain to speak of now?'

And he went away, kindly and casual. He was interested in faces because they were part of his trade, but history was just something that he used for other purposes; something that he set aside in favour of algebra under the desk. He had living bodies in his care, and the future in his hands; he had no thought to spare for problems academic.

Matron, too, had more immediate worries. She listened politely while he put his difficulty to her, but he had the impression that she might say: 'I should see the almoner about it if I were you'. It was not her affair. She looked down from her regal eminence at the great hive below her buzzing with activity, all of it urgent and important; she could hardly be expected to focus her gaze on something more than four hundred years away.

He wanted to say: 'But you of all people should be interested in what can happen to royalty; in the frailness of your reputation's worth. Tomorrow a whisper may destroy you.' But he was already guiltily conscious that to hinder a Matron with irrelevances was to lengthen her already lengthy morning round without reason or excuse.

The Midget did not know what an Attainder was, and made it clear that she did not care.

'It's becoming an obsession with you, that thing,' she said, leaning her head at the portrait. 'It's not healthy. Why don't you read some of those nice books?'

Even Marta, whose visit he had looked forward to so that he could put this odd, new proposition to her and see her reaction, even Marta was too full of wrath with Madeleine March to pay any attention to him.

'After practically promising me that she would write it! After all our get-together and my plans for when this endless thing finally comes to an end. I had even talked to Jacques about clothes! And now she decides that she must write one of her awful little detective stories. She says she must write it while it is fresh – whatever that is.'

He listened to Marta's grieving with sympathy – good plays were the scarcest commodity in the world and good playwrights worth their weight in platinum – but it was like watching something through a window. The fifteenth century was more actual to him this morning than any on-goings in Shaftesbury Avenue.

'I don't suppose it will take her long to write her detective book,' he said comfortingly.

'Oh, no. She does them in six weeks or so. But now that she's off the chain how do I know that I'll ever get her on again. Tony Savilla wants her to write a Marlborough play for him, and you know what Tony is when he sets his heart on something. He'd talk the pigeons off the Admiralty Arch.'

She came back to the Attainder problem, briefly, before she took her leave.

'There's sure to be some explanation, my dear,' she said from the door.

Of *course* there's an explanation, he wanted to shout after her, but what is it? The thing is against all likelihood and sense. Historians say that the murder caused a great revulsion of feeling against Richard, that he was hated for the crime by the common people of England, and that was why they welcomed a stranger in his place. And yet when the tale of his wrongdoing is placed before Parliament there is no mention of the crime.

Richard was dead when that complaint was drawn up, and his followers in flight or exile; his enemies were free to bring against him any charge they could think of. And they had not thought of that spectacular murder.

Why?

The country was reputedly ringing with the scandal of the boys' disappearance. The very recent scandal. And when his enemies collected his alleged offences against morality and the State they had not included Richard's most spectacular piece of infamy.

Why?

Henry needed every small featherweight of advantage in the precarious newness of his accession. He was unknown to the country at large and he had no right by blood to be where he was. But he hadn't used the overwhelming advantage that Richard's published crime would have given him.

Why?

He was succeeding a man of great reputation, known personally to the people from the Marches of Wales to the Scots border, a man universally liked and admired until the disappearance of his nephews. And yet he omitted to use the one real advantage he had against Richard, the unforgivable, the abhorred thing.

Why?

Only The Amazon seemed concerned about the oddity that was engaging his mind; and she not out of any feeling for Richard but because her conscientious soul was distressed at any possibility of mistake. The Amazon would go all the way down the corridor and back again to tear off a page in a loose-leaf calendar that someone had forgotten to remove. But her instinct to be worried was less strong than her instinct to comfort.

'You don't need to worry about it,' she said, soothing. 'There'll be some quite simple explanation that you haven't thought of. It'll come to you sometime when you're thinking of something else altogether. That's usually how I remember where something I've mislaid is. I'll be putting the kettle on in the pantry, or counting the sterile dressings as Sister doles them out, and suddenly I'll think: "Goodness, I left it in my burberry pocket." Whatever the thing was, I mean. So you don't have to worry about it.'

Sergeant Williams was in the wilds of Essex helping the local constabulary to decide who had hit an old shopkeeper over the head with a brass scale-weight and left her dead among the shoelaces and liquorice all-sorts, so there was no help from the Yard.

There was no help from anyone until young Carradine turned up again three days later. Grant thought that his normal insouciance had a deeper tinge than usual; there was almost an air of self-congratulation about him. Being a well-brought-up child he inquired politely about Grant's physical progress, and having been reassured on that point he pulled some notes out of the capacious pocket of his coat and beamed through his horn-rims at his colleague.

'I wouldn't have the sainted More as a present,' he observed pleasantly.

'You're not being offered him. There are no takers.'

'He's away off the beam. Away off.'

'I suspected as much. Let us have the facts. Can you begin on the day Edward died?'

'Sure. Edward died on April the 9th 1483. In London. I mean, in Westminster; which wasn't the same thing then. The Queen and the daughters were living there, *and* the younger boy, I think. The young Prince was doing lessons at Ludlow Castle in charge of the Queen's brother, Lord Rivers. The Queen's relations are very much to the fore, did you know? The place is just lousy with Woodvilles.'

'Yes, I know. Go on. Where was Richard?'

'On the Scottish border.'

'What!'

'Yes, I said: on the Scottish border. Caught away off base. But does he yell for a horse and go posting off to London? He does not.'

'What did he do?'

'He arranged for a requiem mass at York, to which all the nobility of the North were summoned, and in his presence took an oath of loyalty to the young Prince.'

'Interesting,' Grant said dryly. 'What did Rivers do? The Queen's brother?'

'On the 24th of April he set out with the Prince for London. With two thousand men and a large supply of arms.'

'What did he want the arms for?'

'Don't ask me. I'm only a Research Worker. Dorset, the elder of the Queen's two sons by her first marriage, took over both the arsenal and the treasure in the Tower and began to fit up ships to command the Channel. And Council orders were issued in the name of Rivers and Dorset – avunculus Regis and frater Regis uterinus respectively – with no mention of Richard. Which was decidedly off-colour when you remember – if you ever knew – that in his will Edward had appointed Richard guardian of the boy and Protector of the Kingdom in case of any minority. Richard alone, mind you, without a colleague.'

'Yes, that is in character, at least. He must always have had complete faith in Richard. Both as a person and as an administrator. Did Richard come south with a young army too?'

'No. He came with six hundred gentlemen of the North, all in deep mourning. He arrived at Northampton on April the 29th. He had apparently expected to join up with the Ludlow crowd there; but that is report and you have only a historian's word for it. But the Ludlow procession – Rivers and the young Prince – had gone on to Stoney Stratford without waiting for him. The person who actually met him at Northampton was the Duke of Buckingham with three hundred men. Do you know Buckingham?'

'We have a nodding acquaintance. He was a friend of Edward's.'

'Yes. He arrived post haste from London.'

'With the news of what was going on.'

'It's a fair deduction. He wouldn't bring three hundred men just to express his condolences. Anyhow a Council was held there and then – he had all the material for a proper Council in his own train and Buckingham's, and Rivers and his three aides were arrested and sent to the North, while Richard went on with the young Prince to London. They arrived in London on the 4th of May.'

'Well, that is very nice and clear. And what is clearest of all is that, considering time and distances, the sainted More's account of his writing sweet letters to the Queen to induce her to send only a small escort for the boy, is nonsense.'

'Bunk.'

'Indeed, Richard did just what one would expect him to do. He must of course have known the provisions of Edward's will. What his actions suggest is just what one would expect them to suggest; his own sorrow and his care for the boy. A requiem mass and an oath of allegiance.'

'Yes '

'Where does the break in this orthodox pattern come? I mean: in Richard's behaviour.'

'Oh, not for a long time. When he arrived in London he found that the Queen, the younger boy, the daughters, and her first-marriage son, Dorset, had all bolted into sanctuary at Westminster. But apart from that things seem to have been normal.'

'Did he take the boy to the Tower?'

Carradine riffled through his notes. 'I don't remember. Perhaps I didn't get that. I was only – Oh, yes, here it is. No, he took the boy to the Bishop's Palace in St Paul's Churchyard, and he himself went to stay with his mother at Baynard's Castle. Do you know where that was? I don't.'

'Yes. It was the Yorks' town house. It stood on the bank of the river just a little way west of St Paul's.'

'Oh. Well, he stayed there until June the 5th, when his wife arrived from the North and they went to stay in a house called Crosby Place.'

'It is still called Crosby Place. It has been moved to Chelsea, and the window Richard put into it may not still be there – I haven't seen it lately – but the building is there.'

'It is?' Carradine said, delighted. 'I'll go and see it right away. It's a very domestic tale when you think of it, isn't it. Staying with his mother until his wife gets to town, and then moving in with her. Was Crosby Place theirs, then?'

'Richard had leased it, I think. It belonged to one of the Aldermen of London. So there is no suggestion of opposition to his Protectorship, or of change of plans, when he arrived in London.'

'Oh, no. He was acknowledged Protector before he ever arrived in London.'

'How do you know that?'

'In the Patent Rolls he is called Protector on two occasions – let me see – April 21st (that's less than a fortnight after Edward's death) and May the 2nd (that's two days before he arrived in London at all.)'

'All right; I'm sold. And no fuss? No hint of trouble?'

'Not that I can find. On the 5th of June he gave detailed orders for the boy's coronation on the 22nd. He even had letters of summons sent out to the forty squires who would be made knights of the Bath. It seems it was the custom for the King to knight them on the occasion of his coronation.'

'The 5th,' Grant said musingly. 'And he fixed the coronation for the 22nd. He wasn't leaving himself much time for a switch-over.'

'No. There's even a record of the order for the boy's coronation clothes.'

'And then what?'

'Well,' Carradine said, apologetic, 'that's as far as I've got. Something happened at a Council – on the 8th of June, I think – but the contemporary account is in the *Mémoires* of Philippe de Comines and I haven't been able to get hold of a copy so far. But someone has promised to let me see a copy of Mandrot's 1901 printing of it tomorrow. It seems that the Bishop of Bath broke some news to the Council on June the 8th. Do you know the Bishop of Bath? His name was Stillington.'

'Never heard of him.'

'He was a Fellow of All Souls, whatever that is, and a Canon of York, whatever that may be.'

'Both learned and respectable, it appears.'

'Well, we'll see.'

'Have you turned up any contemporary historians - other than Comines?'

'Not any, so far, who wrote before Richard's death. Comines has a French bias but not a Tudor one, so he's more trustworthy than an Englishman writing about Richard under the Tudors would be. But I've got a lovely sample for you of how history is made. I found it when I was looking up the contemporary writers. You know that one of the things they tell about Richard III is that he killed Henry VI's only son in cold blood after the battle of Tewkesbury? Well, believe it or not, that story is made up out of whole cloth. You can trace it from the very time it was first told. It's the perfect answer to people who say there's no smoke without fire. Believe me this smoke was made by rubbing two pieces of dry stick together.'

'But Richard was just a boy at the time of Tewkesbury.'

'He was eighteen, I think. And a very bonny fighter by all contemporary accounts. They were the same age, Henry's son and Richard. Well, *all* the contemporary accounts, of whatever complexion, are unanimous in saying that he was killed during the battle. Then the fun begins.'

Carradine fluttered through his notes impatiently.

'Goldarn it, what did I do with it? Ah. Here we are. Now. Fabyan, writing for Henry VII, says that the boy was captured and brought before Edward IV, was struck in the face by Edward with his gauntlet and immediately slain by the King's servants. Nice? But Polydore Virgil goes one better. He says that the murder was done in person by George, Duke of Clarence, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and William, Lord Hastings. Hall adds Dorset to the murderers. But that didn't

satisfy Holinshed: Holinshed reports that it was Richard Duke of Gloucester who struck the first blow. How do you like that? Best quality Tonypandy, isn't it.'

'Pure Tonypandy. A dramatic story with not a word of truth in it. If you can bear to listen to a few sentences of the sainted More, I'll give you another sample of how history is made.'

'The sainted More makes me sick at the stomach but I'll listen.'

Grant looked for the paragraph he wanted, and read:

Some wise men also ween that his drift [that is, Richard's drift] covertly conveyed, lacked not in helping forth his brother Clarence to his death; which he resisted openly, howbeit somewhat, as men deemed, more faintly than he that were heartily minded to his weal. And they who deem thus think that he, long time in King Edward's life, forethought to be King in case that the King his brother (whose life he looked that evil diet should shorten) should happen to decease (as indeed he did) while his children were young. And they deem that for this intent he was glad of his brother Clarence's death, whose life must needs have hindered him so intending whether the same Clarence had kept true to his nephew the young King or enterprised to be King himself. But of all this point there is no certainty, and whoso divineth upon conjectures may as well shoot too far as too short.

'The mean, burbling, insinuating old dotard,' said Carradine sweetly.

'Were you clever enough to pick out the one positive statement in all that speculation?'

'Oh, yes.

'You spotted it? That was smart of you. I had to read it three times before I got the one ungualified fact.'

'That Richard protested openly against his brother George being put to death.'

'Yes

'Of course, with all that "men say" stuff,' Carradine observed, 'the impression that is left is just the opposite. I told you, I wouldn't have the sainted More as a present.'

'I think we ought to remember that it is John Morton's account and not the sainted More's.'

'The sainted More sounds better. Besides, he liked the thing well enough to be copying it out.'

Grant, the one-time soldier, lay thinking of the expert handling of that very sticky situation at Northampton.

'It was neat of him to mop up Rivers' two thousand without any open clash.'

'I expect they preferred the King's brother to the Queen's brother, if they were faced with it.'

'Yes. And of course a fighting man has a better chance with troops than a man who writes books.'

'Did Rivers write books?'

'He wrote the first book printed in England. Very cultured, he was.'

'Huh. It doesn't seem to have taught him not to try conclusions with a man who was a brigadier at eighteen and a general before he was twenty-five. That's one thing that has surprised me, you know.'

'Richard's qualities as a soldier?'

'No, his youth. I'd always thought of him as a middle-aged grouch. He was only thirty-two when he was killed at Bosworth.'

'Tell me: when Richard took over the boy's guardianship, at Stoney Stratford, did he make a clean sweep of the Ludlow crowd? I mean, was the boy separated from all the people he had been growing up with?'

'Oh, no. His tutor, Dr Alcock, came on to London with him, for one.'

'So there was no panic clearing-out of everyone who might be on the Woodville side; everyone who might influence the boy against him.'

'Seems not. Just the four arrests.'

'Yes. A very neat, discriminating operation altogether. I felicitate Richard Plantagenet.'

'I'm positively beginning to like the guy. Well, I'm going along now to look at Crosby Place. I'm tickled pink at the thought of actually looking at a place he lived in. And tomorrow I'll have that copy of Comines, and let you know what he says about events in England in 1483, and what Robert Stillington, Bishop of Bath, told the Council in June of that year.'

What Stillington told the Council on that summer day in 1483 was, Grant learned, that he had married Edward IV to Lady Eleanor Butler, a daughter of the first Earl of Shrewsbury, before Edward married Elizabeth Woodville. 'Why had he kept it to himself so long?' he asked when he had digested the news.

'Edward had commanded him to keep it secret. Naturally.'

'Edward seems to have made a habit of secret marriages,' Grant said dryly.

'Well, it must have been difficult for him, you know, when he came up against unassailable virtue. There was nothing for it but marriage. And he was so used to getting his own way with women – what with his looks and his crown – that he couldn't have taken very resignedly to frustration.'

'Yes. That was the pattern of the Woodville marriage. The indestructibly virtuous beauty with the gilt hair, and the secret wedding. So Edward had used the same formula on a previous occasion, if Stillington's story was true. Was it true?'

'Well, in Edward's time, it seems, he was in turn both Privy Seal and Lord Chancellor, and he had been an ambassador to Brittany. So Edward either owed him something or liked him. And he, on his part, had no reason to cook up anything against Edward. Supposing he was the cooking sort.'

'No, I suppose not.'

'Anyway, the thing was put to Parliament so we don't have to take just Stillington's word for it.'

'To Parliament!'

'Sure. Everything was open and above board. There was a very long meeting of the Lords at Westminster on the 9th. Stillington brought in his evidence and his witnesses, and a report was prepared to put before Parliament when it assembled on the 25th. On the 10th Richard sent a letter to the city of York asking for troops to protect and support him.'

'Ha! Trouble at last.'

'Yes. On the 11th he sent a similar letter to his cousin Lord Nevill. So the danger was real.'

'It must have been real. A man who dealt so economically with that unexpected and very nasty situation at Northampton wouldn't be one to lose his head at a threat.'

'On the 20th he went with a small body of retainers to the Tower – did you know that the Tower was the royal residence in London, and not a prison at all?'

'Yes, I knew that. It got its prison meaning only because nowadays being sent to the Tower has one meaning only. And of course because, being the royal castle in London, and the only strong keep, offenders were sent there for safe keeping in the days before we had His Majesty's Prisons. What did Richard go to the Tower for?'

'He went to interrupt a meeting of the conspirators, and arrested Lord Hastings, Lord Stanley, and one John Morton, Bishop of Ely.'

'I thought we would arrive at John Morton sooner or later!'

'A proclamation was issued, giving details of the plot to murder Richard, but apparently no copy now exists. Only one of the conspirators was beheaded, and that one, oddly enough, seems to have been an old friend of both Edward and Richard. Lord Hastings.'

'Yes, according to the sainted More he was rushed down to the courtyard and beheaded on the nearest log.'

'Rushed nothing,' said Carradine disgustedly. 'He was beheaded a week later. There's a contemporary letter about it that gives the date. Moreover, Richard couldn't have done it out of sheer vindictiveness, because he granted Hastings' forfeited estates to his widow, and restored the children's right of succession to them – which they had automatically lost.'

'No, the death of Hastings must have been inevitable,' said Grant, who was thumbing through More's *Richard III*. 'Even the sainted More says:"Undoubtedly the Protector loved him well, and was loth to have lost him". What happened to Stanley and to John Morton?'

'Stanley was pardoned - What are you groaning about?'

'Poor Richard. That was his death warrant.'

'Death warrant? How could pardoning Stanley be his death warrant?'

'Because it was Stanley's sudden decision to go over to the other side that lost Richard the battle of Bosworth.'

'You don't say.'

'Odd to think that if Richard had seen to it that Stanley went to the block like his much-loved Hastings he would have won the battle of Bosworth, there would never have been any Tudors, and the hunchbacked monster that appears in Tudor tradition would never have been invented. On his previous showing he would probably have had the best and most enlightened reign in history. What was done to Morton?'

'Nothing.'

'Another mistake.'

'Or at least nothing to signify. He was put into gentlemanly detention under the care of Buckingham. The people who did go to the block were the heads of the conspiracy that Richard had arrested at Northampton: Rivers and Co. And Jane

Shore was sentenced to do penance.'

'Jane Shore? What on earth has she got to do with the case? I thought she was Edward's mistress?'

'So she was. But Hastings inherited her from Edward, it seems. Or rather – let me see – Dorset did. And she was gobetween between the Hastings side of the conspiracy and the Woodville side. One of Richard's letters existing today is about her. About Jane Shore.'

'What about her?

'His Solicitor-General wanted to marry her; when he was King, I mean.'

'And he agreed?'

'He agreed. It's a lovely letter. More in sorrow than in anger – With a kind of twinkle in it.'

"Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

'That's it exactly.'

'No vindictiveness there, either, it seems.'

'No. Quite the opposite. You know, I know it isn't my business to think or draw deductions – I'm just the Research Worker – but it does strike me that Richard's ambition was to put an end to the York-Lancaster fight once and for all.'

'What makes you think that?'

'Well, I've been looking at his coronation lists. It was the best-attended coronation on record, incidentally. You can't help being struck by the fact that practically nobody stayed away. Lancaster or York.'

'Including the weather-cock Stanley, I suppose.'

'I suppose so. I don't know them well enough to remember them individually.'

'Perhaps you're right about his wanting a final end to the York-Lancaster feud. Perhaps his lenience with Stanley was due to that very thing.'

'Was Stanley a Lancastrian, then?'

'No, but he was married to an abnormally rabid one. His wife was Margaret Beaufort, and the Beauforts were the reverse side, so to speak – the illegitimate side – of the Lancaster family. Not that her by-blow side worried her. *Or* her son.'

'Who was her son?'

'Henry VII.'

Carradine whistled, long and low.

'You actually mean to say that Lady Stanley was Henry's mother.'

'She was. By her first husband Edmund Tudor.'

'But – but Lady Stanley had a place of honour at Richard's coronation. She carried the Queen's train. I noticed that because I thought it quaint. Carrying the train, I mean. In our country we don't carry trains. It's an honour, I take it.'

'It's a thundering great honour. Poor Richard. Poor Richard. It didn't work.'

'What didn't?'

'Magnanimity.' He lay thinking about it while Carradine shuffled through his notes. 'So Parliament accepted the evidence of Stillington.'

'They did more. They incorporated it into an Act, giving Richard the title to the crown. It was called Titulus Regius.'

'For a holy man of God, Stillington wasn't cutting a very glorious figure. But I suppose that to have talked sooner would have been to compass his own ruin.'

'You're a bit hard on him, aren't you? There wasn't any need to talk sooner. No harm was being done anyone.'

'What about Lady Eleanor Butler?'

'She had died in a convent. She's buried in the Church of the White Carmelites at Norwich, in case you're interested. As long as Edward was alive no wrong was being done anyone. But when it came to the question of succession, then he *had* to talk, whatever kind of figure he cut.'

'Yes. Of course you're right. So the children were proclaimed illegitimate, in open Parliament. And Richard was crowned. With all the nobility of England in attendance. Was the Queen still in sanctuary?'

'Yes. But she had let the younger boy join his brother.'

'When was that?'

Carradine searched through his notes. 'On June the 16th. I've put: "At the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Both boys living at the Tower."

'That was after the news had broken. The news that they were illegitimate.'

'Yes.' He tidied his notes into some kind of neatness and put them away in the enormous pocket. 'That seems to be all, to date. But here's the pay-off.' He gathered his train from either side of him on to his knees with a gesture that both Marta and King Richard might have envied. 'You know that Act, that Titulus Regius.'

'Yes: what about it?'

'Well, when Henry VII came to the throne he ordered that the Act should be repealed, without being read. He ordered that the Act itself should be destroyed, and forbade any copies to be kept. Anyone who kept a copy was to be fined and

imprisoned during his pleasure.'

Grant stared in great astonishment.

'Henry VII!' he said. 'Why? What possible difference could it make to him?'

'I haven't a glimmer of an idea. But I mean to find out before I'm much older. Meanwhile, here is something to keep you amused till the Statue of Liberty brings your British tea.'

He dropped a paper on to Grant's chest.

'What is this?' Grant said, looking at the torn-out page of a note-book.

'It's that letter of Richard's about Jane Shore. I'll be seeing you.'

Left alone by himself in the guiet, Grant turned over the page and read.

The contrast between the sprawling childish hand-writing and the formal phrases of Richard's imagining was piquant in the extreme. But what neither the untidy modern script nor the dignified phrases could destroy was the flavour of the letter. The bouquet of good humour that came up from the page as a bouquet comes up from a good-humoured wine. Translated into modern terms it said:

I hear to my great astonishment that Tom Lynom wants to marry Will Shore's wife. Apparently he is infatuated with her, and is quite determined about it. Do, my dear Bishop, send for him and see if you can talk some sense into his silly head. If you can't, and if there is no bar to their marriage from the Church's point of view, then I agree to it, but tell him to postpone the marriage till I am back in London. Meanwhile this will suffice to secure her release, on surety for her good behaviour, and I suggest that you hand her over for the time being to the care of her father, or anyone else who seems good to you.

It was certainly, as young Carradine had said, 'more in sorrow than in anger'. Indeed, considering that it was written about a woman who had done him a deadly wrong, its kindness and good temper was remarkable. And this was a case where no personal advantage could come to him from magnanimity. The broad mindedness that had sought for a York-Lancaster peace might not have been disinterested; it would have been enormously to his advantage to have a united country to rule. But this letter to the Bishop of Lincoln was a small private matter, and the release of Jane Shore of no importance to anyone but the infatuated Tom Lynom. Richard had nothing to gain by his generosity. His instinct to see a friend happy was apparently greater than his instinct for revenge.

Indeed, his instinct for revenge seemed to be lacking to a degree that would be surprising in any red-blooded male, and quite astonishing in the case of that reputed monster Richard III.

The letter lasted Grant very nicely until The Amazon brought his tea. He listened to the twentieth century sparrows on his window-sill and marvelled that he should be reading phrases that formed in a man's mind more than four hundred years ago. What a fantastic idea it would have seemed to Richard that anyone would be reading that short, intimate letter about Shore's wife, and wondering about him, four hundred years afterwards.

'There's a letter for you, now isn't that nice,' The Amazon said, coming in with his two pieces of bread-and-butter and a rock bun.

Grant took his eyes from the uncompromising healthiness of the rock bun and saw that the letter was from Laura.

He opened it with pleasure.

Dear Alan (said Laura)

Nothing (repeat: nothing) would surprise me about history. Scotland has large monuments to two women martyrs drowned for their faith, in spite of the fact that they weren't drowned at all and neither was a martyr anyway. They were convicted of treason – fifth column work for the projected invasion from Holland, I think. Anyhow on a purely civil charge. They were reprieved on their own petition by the Privy Council, and the reprieve is in the Privy Council Register to this day.

This, of course, hasn't daunted the Scottish collectors of martyrs, and the tale of their sad end, complete with heart-rending dialogue, is to be found in every Scottish bookcase. Entirely different dialogue in each collection. And the gravestone of one of the women, in Wigtown churchyard, reads:

Murdered for owning Christ supreme

Head of his Church, and no more crime

But her not owning Prelacy

And not abjuring Presbytry

Within the sea tied to a stake

She suffered for Christ Jesus sake.

They are even a subject for fine Presbyterian sermons, I understand – though on that point I speak from hearsay. And tourists come and shake their heads over the monuments with their moving inscriptions, and a very profitable time is had by all.

All this in spite of the fact that the original collector of the material, canvassing the Wigtown district only forty years after the supposed martyrdom and at the height of the Presbyterian triumph, complains that 'many deny that this happened'; and couldn't find any eyewitnesses at all.

It is very good news that you are convalescent, and a great relief to us all. If you manage it well your sick leave can coincide with the spring run. The water is very low at the moment, but by the time you are better it should be deep enough to please both the fish and you.

Love from us all,

I aura

P.S. It's an odd thing but when you tell someone the true facts of a mythical tale they are indignant not with the teller but with you. They don't want to have their ideas upset. It rouses some vague uneasiness in them, I think, and they resent it. So they reject it and refuse to think about it. If they were merely indifferent it would be natural and understandable. But it is much stronger than that, much more positive. They are annoyed.

Very odd, isn't it.

More Tonypandy, he thought.

He began to wonder just how much of the schoolbook which up to now had represented British history for him was Tonypandy.

He went back, now that he knew a few facts, to read the sainted More again. To see how the relevant passages sounded now.

If, when he had read them merely by the light of his own critical mind, they had seemed to him curiously tattling, and in places absurd, they now read plain abominable. He was what Laura's small Pat was in the habit of calling 'scunnered'. And he was also puzzled.

This was Morton's account. Morton the eyewitness, the participant. Morton must have known with minute accuracy what took place between the beginning and end of June that year. And yet there was no mention of Lady Eleanor Butler; no mention of Titulus Regius. According to Morton, Richard's case had been that Edward was previously married to his mistress Elizabeth Lucy. But Elizabeth Lucy, Morton pointed out, had denied that she was ever married to the King.

Why did Morton set up a ninepin just to knock it down again?

Why the substitution of Elizabeth Lucy for Eleanor Butler?

Because he could deny with truth that Lucy was ever married to the King, but could not do the same in the case of Eleanor Butler?

Surely the presumption was that it was very important to someone or other that Richard's claim that the children were illegitimate should be shown to be untenable.

And since Morton – in the handwriting of the sainted More – was writing for Henry VII, then that someone was presumably Henry VII. The Henry VII who had destroyed Titulus Regius and forbidden anyone to keep a copy.

Something Carradine had said came back into Grant's mind.

Henry had caused the Act to be repealed without being read.

It was so important to Henry that the contents of the Act should not be brought to mind that he had specially provided for its unquoted destruction.

Why should it be of such importance to Henry VII?

How could it matter to *Henry* what Richard's rights were? It was not as if he could say: Richard's claim was a trumped-up one, therefore mine is good. Whatever wretched small claim Henry Tudor might have was a Lancastrian one, and the heirs of York did not enter into the matter.

Then why should it have been of such paramount importance to Henry that the contents of Titulus Regius should be forgotten?

Why hide away Eleanor Butler, and bring in in her place a mistress whom no one ever suggested was married to the King?

This problem lasted Grant very happily till just before supper; when the porter came in with a note for him. 'The front hall says that young American friend of yours left this for you,' the porter said, handing him a folded sheet of paper.

'Thank you,' said Grant. What do you know about Richard the Third?'

'Is there a prize?'

'What for?'

'The quiz.'

'No, just the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity. What do you know about Richard III?'

'He was the first multiple murderer.'

'Multiple? I thought it was two nephews?'

'No, oh, no. I don't know much history but I do know that. Murdered his brother, and his cousin, and the poor old King in the Tower, and then finished off with his little nephews. A wholesale performer.'

Grant considered this.

'If I told you that he never murdered anyone at all, what would you say?'

'I'd say that you're perfectly entitled to your opinion. Some people believe the earth is flat. Some people believe the world is going to end in A.D. 2000. Some people believe that it began less than five thousand years ago. You'll hear far funnier things than that at Marble Arch of a Sunday.'

'So you wouldn't even entertain the idea for a monument?'

'I find it entertaining all right, but not what you might call very plausible, shall we say. But don't let me stand in your way. Try it out on a better bombing range. You take it to Marble Arch one Sunday, and I'll bet you'll find followers aplenty. Maybe start a movement.'

He made a gay sketchy half-salute with his hand and went away humming to himself; secure and impervious.

So help me, Grant thought, I'm not far off it. If I get any deeper into this thing I will be standing on a soapbox at Marble Arch.

He unfolded the message from Carradine, and read: 'You said that you wanted to know whether the other heirs to the throne survived Richard. As well as the boys, I mean. I forgot to say: would you make out a list of them for me, so that I can look them up. I think it's going to be important.'

Well, if the world in general went on its humming way, brisk and uncaring, at least he had young America on his side.

He put aside the sainted More, with its Sunday-paper accounts of hysterical scenes and wild accusations, and reached for the sober student's account of history so that he might catalogue the possible rivals to Richard III in the English succession.

And as he put down More-Morton, he was reminded of something.

That hysterical scene during the Council in the Tower which was reported by More, that frantic outburst on Richard's part against the sorcery that had withered his arm, had been against Jane Shore.

The contrast between the reported scene, pointless and repellent even to a disinterested reader, and the kind, tolerant, almost casual air of the letter that Richard had actually written about her, was staggering.

So help me, he thought again, if I had to choose between the man who wrote that account and the man who wrote that letter I'd take the man who wrote the letter, whatever either of them had done besides.

The thought of Morton made him postpone his listing of the York heirs until he had found out what eventually became of John Morton. It seemed that, having used his leisure as Buckingham's guest to organise a joint Woodville-Lancastrian effort (in which Henry Tudor would bring ships and troops from France and Dorset and the rest of the Woodville tribe would meet him with what English malcontents they could induce to follow them) he escaped to his old hunting ground in the Ely district, and from there to the continent. And did not come back until he came in the wake of a Henry who had won both Bosworth and a crown; being himself on the way to Canterbury and a cardinal's hat and immortality as Morton of 'Morton's Fork'. Almost the only thing that any schoolboy remembered about his master Henry VII.

For the rest of the evening Grant pottered happily through the history books, collecting heirs.

There was no lack of them. Edward's five, George's boy and girl. And if these were discounted, the first through illegitimacy and the second through attainder, there was another possible: his elder sister Elizabeth's boy. Elizabeth was Duchess of Suffolk, and her son was John de la Pole. Earl of Lincoln.

There was, too, in the family, a boy whose existence Grant had not suspected. It appeared that the delicate child at Middleham was not Richard's only son. He had a love-child; a boy called John. John of Gloucester. A boy of no importance in rank, but acknowledged and living in the household. It was an age when a bend sinister was accepted without grief. Indeed the Conqueror had made it fashionable. And conquerors from then on had advertised its lack of disadvantage. By way of compensation, perhaps.

Grant made himself a little aide mémoire.

EDWARD: Edward Prince of Wales, Richard Duke of York, Elizabeth, Cicely, Anne, Katherine, Bridget

ELIZABETH: John de la Pole Earl of Lincoln

GEORGE: Edward Earl of Warwick, Margaret Countess of Salisbury

RICHARD John of Gloucester

He copied it out again for young Carradine's use, wondering how it could ever have occurred to anyone, Richard most of all, that the elimination of Edward's two boys would have kept him safe from rebellion. The place was what young Carradine would call just lousy with heirs. Swarming with focuses (or was it foci?) for disaffection.

It was brought home to him for the first time not only what a useless thing the murder of the boys would have been, but what a *silly* thing.

And if there was anything that Richard of Gloucester was not, beyond a shadow of a doubt, it was silly.

He looked up Oliphant to see what Oliphant had to say on this obvious crack in the story.

'It is strange,' said Oliphant, 'that Richard does not seem to have published any version of their deaths.'

It was more than strange: it was incomprehensible.

If Richard had wanted to murder his brother's sons then he most certainly would have done it expertly. They would have died of a fever, and their bodies would have been exposed to the public gaze as royal bodies habitually were, so that all men would know that they were in fact departed from this life.

No one can say that a man is incapable of murder – after long years on the Embankment Grant knew that only too well – but one can be sure to within one degree of the absolute when a man is incapable of silliness.

Oliphant had no doubts about the murder, nevertheless. Richard according to Oliphant was Richard the Monster. Perhaps when an historian was covering a field as large as the Middle Ages and the Renaissance he had no time to stop and analyse detail. Oliphant accepted the sainted More, even while he paused in flight to wonder at an oddity here and there. Not seeing that the oddities ate away at the very foundations of his theory.

Having Oliphant in his hand, he went on with Oliphant. On through the triumphal progress through England after the coronation. Oxford, Gloucester, Worcester, Warwick. No dissentient voice was recorded on that tour. Only a chorus of blessing and thanksgiving. A rejoicing that good government was to be the order of the day for a lifetime to come. That after all, Edward's sudden death had not condemned them to years of faction and a new civil struggle over the person of his son.

And yet it was during this triumph, this unanimous acclamation, this universal hosanna, that (according to Oliphant, riding in the pocket of the sainted More) Richard sent Tyrrel back to London to make away with the boys who were doing lessons in the Tower. Between July 7th and 15th. At Warwick. In the very summer of his safety, in the heart of the York country on the borders of Wales, he planned the destruction of two discredited children.

It was a highly unlikely story.

He began to wonder whether historians were possessed of minds any more commonsensical than those Great Minds he had encountered, who had been so credulous.

He must find out without delay why, if Tyrrel did that job in July 1485, he wasn't brought to book until twenty years afterwards. Where had he been in the meantime?

But Richard's summer was like an April day. Full of a promise that came to nothing. In the autumn he had to face that Woodville-Lancastrian invasion which Morton had cooked up before leaving these shores himself. The Lancastrian part of the affair did Morton proud: they came with a fleet of French ships and a French army. But the Woodville side could provide nothing better than sporadic little gatherings in widely separated centres: Guildford, Salisbury, Maidstone, Newbury, Exeter, and Brecon. The English wanted no part of Henry Tudor, whom they did not know, nor any part of the Woodvilles, whom they knew only too well. Even the English weather would have none of them. And Dorset's hopes of seeing his half-sister Elizabeth queen of England as Henry Tudor's wife were washed away in Severn floods. Henry tried to land in the West, but found Devon and Cornwall up in indignant arms at the idea. He therefore sailed away to France again, to wait for a luckier day. And Dorset went to join the growing crowd of Woodville exiles hanging round the French court.

So Morton's plan was washed away in autumn rain and English indifference, and Richard could be at peace for a little; but with the spring came a grief that nothing could wash away. The death of his son.

'The King is said to have shown signs of desperate grief; he was not such an unnatural monster as to be destitute of the feelings of a father,' said the historian.

Nor of a husband, it seemed. The same marks of suffering were reported of him less than a year later, when Anne died. And after that there was nothing but the waiting for the renewal of the invasion that had failed; the keeping of England in a state of defence, and the anxiety that that drain on the Exchequer brought him.

He had done what good he could. He had given his name to a model Parliament. He had made peace at last with Scotland and arranged a marriage between his niece and James III's son. He had tried very hard for a peace with France, but had failed. At the French court was Henry Tudor, and Henry Tudor was France's white-headed boy. It would be only a matter of time before Henry landed in England, this time with better backing.

Grant suddenly remembered Lady Stanley, that ardent Lancastrian mother of Henry. What part had Lady Stanley had in that autumn invasion that had put paid to Richard's summer?

He hunted through the solid print until he found it.

Lady Stanley had been found guilty of treasonable correspondence with her son.

But again Richard had proved too lenient for his own good, it seemed. Her estates were forfeit, but they were handed over to her husband. And so was Lady Stanley. For safe keeping. The bitter joke being that Stanley had almost certainly been as knowledgeable about the invasion as his wife.

Truly, the monster was not running according to form.

As Grant was falling asleep a voice said in his mind: 'If the boys were murdered in July, and the Woodville-Lancastrian invasion took place in October, why didn't they use the murder of the children as a rallying call?'

The invasion had, of course, been planned before there was any question of murder; it was a full-dress affair of fifteen ships and five thousand mercenaries and must have taken a long time to prepare. But by the time of the rising the rumours of Richard's infamy must have been widespread if there were any rumours at all. Why had they not gone shouting his crime through England, so that the horror of it brought men flocking to their cause?

'Cool off, cool off,' he said to himself when he woke next morning, 'you're beginning to be partisan. That's no way to conduct an investigation.'

So, by way of moral discipline, he became prosecutor.

Supposing that the Butler story was a frame-up. A story concocted with Stillington's help. Supposing that both Lords and Commons were willing to be hoodwinked in the hope of stable Government to come.

Did that bring one any nearer the murder of the two boys?

It didn't, did it?

If the story was false, the person to be got rid of was Stillington. Lady Eleanor had died in her convent long ago, so was not there to blow Titulus Regius to pieces any time she had a mind. But Stillington could. And Stillington evidently showed no difficulty in going on living. He survived the man he had put on the throne.

The sudden jar in the proceedings, the abrupt break in the pattern of the coronation preparation, was either wonderful stage-managing or just what one would expect if the thunderclap of Stillington's confession descended on prepared ears. Richard was – what? Eleven? Twelve? – when the Butler contract was signed and witnessed; it was unlikely that he knew anything of it.

If the Butler story was an invention to oblige Richard, then Richard must have rewarded Stillington. But there was no sign of Stillington's being obliged with a cardinal's hat, or preferment, or office.

But the surest evidence that the Butler story was true lay in Henry VII's urgent need to destroy it. If it were false, then all he had to do to discredit Richard was to bring it into the open and make Stillington eat his words. Instead he hushed it up.

At this point Grant realised with disgust that he was back on the Defence side again. He decided to give it up. He would take to Lavinia Fitch, or Rupert Rouge, or some other of the fashionable authors lying in such expensive neglect on his table, and forget Richard Plantagenet until such time as young Carradine appeared to renew the inquisition.

He put the family-tree sketch of Cicely Nevill's grandchildren into an envelope and addressed it to Carradine, and gave it to The Midget to post. Then he turned-down the portrait that was leaning against the books, so that he should not be seduced by that face which Sergeant Williams had placed, without hesitation, on the bench, and reached for Silas Weekley's *The Sweat and the Furrow*. Thereafter he went from Silas's seamy wrestlings to Lavinia's tea-cups, and from Lavinia's tea-cups to Rupert's cavortings in the *coulisses*, with a growing dissatisfaction, until Brent Carradine once more turned up in his life.

Carradine regarded him anxiously and said: 'You don't look so bright as last time I saw you, Mr Grant. You not doing so

'Not where Richard is concerned, I'm not,' Grant said. 'But I've got a new piece of Tonypandy for you.'

And he handed him Laura's letter about the drowned women who were never drowned.

Carradine read it with a delight that grew on him like slow sunlight coming out, until eventually he glowed.

'My, but that's wonderful. That's very superior, first growth, dyed-in-the-wool Tonypandy, isn't it. Lovely, lovely. You didn't know about this before? And you a Scotsman?'

'I'm only a Scot once removed,' Grant pointed out. 'No; I knew that none of these Covenanters died "for their Faith", of course; but I didn't know that one of them – or rather, two of them – hadn't died at all.'

'They didn't die for their Faith?' Carradine repeated, bewildered. 'D'you mean that the whole thing's Tonypandy?'

Grant laughed. 'I suppose it is,' he said, surprised. 'I never thought about it before. I've known so long that the "martyrs" were no more martyrs than that thug who is going to his death for killing that old shop-keeper in Essex, that I've ceased to think about it. No one in Scotland went to his death for anything but civil crime.'

'But I thought they were very holy people - the Covenanters, I mean.'

'You've been looking at nineteenth-century pictures of coventicles. The reverent little gathering in the heather listening to the preacher; young rapt faces, and white hair blowing in the winds of God. The Covenanters were the exact equivalent of the I.R.A. in Ireland. A small irreconcilable minority, and as bloodthirsty a crowd as ever disgraced a Christian nation. If you went to church on Sunday instead of to a conventicle, you were liable to wake on Monday and find your barn burned or your horses hamstrung. If you were more open in your disapproval you were shot. The men who shot Archbishop Sharp in his daughter's presence, in broad daylight on a road in Fife, were the heroes of the movement. "Men of courage and zeal for the cause of God", according to their admiring followers. They lived safe and swaggering among their Covenanting fans in the West for years. It was a "preacher of the gospel" who shot Bishop Honeyman in an Edinburgh street. And they shot the old parish priest of Carsphairn on his own doorstep.'

'It does sound like Ireland, doesn't it.' Carradine said.

'They were actually worse than the I.R.A. because there was a fifth column element in it. They were financed from Holland, and their arms came from Holland. There was nothing forlorn about their movement, you know. They expected to take over the Government any day, and rule Scotland. All their preaching was pure sedition. The most violent incitement to

crime you could imagine. No modern Government could afford to be so patient with such a menace as the Government of the time were. The Covenanters were continually being offered amnesties.'

'Well, well. And I thought they were fighting for freedom to worship God their own way.'

'No one ever stopped them from worshipping God any way they pleased. What they were out to do was to impose their method of church government not only on Scotland but on England, believe it or not. You should read the Covenant some day. Freedom of worship was not to be allowed to anyone according to the Covenanting creed – except the Covenanters, of course.'

'And all those gravestones and monuments that tourists go to see - '

'All Tonypandy. If you ever read on a gravestone that John Whosit "suffered death for his adherence to the Word of God and Scotland's Covenanted work of Reformation", with a touching little verse underneath about "dust sacrificed to tyranny", you can be sure that the said John Whosit was found guilty before a properly constituted court, of a civil crime punishable by death and that his death had nothing whatever to do with the Word of God.' He laughed a little under his breath. 'It's the final irony, you know, that a group whose name was anathema to the rest of Scotland in their own time should have been elevated into the position of saints and martyrs.'

'I wouldn't wonder if it wasn't onomatopoeic,' Carradine said thoughtfully.

'What?'

'Like the Cat and the Rat, you know.'

'What are you talking about?'

"Member you said, about that Cat and Rat lampoon, that rhyme, that the sound of it made it an offence?"

'Yes: made it venomous.'

'Well, the word dragoon does the same thing. I take it that the dragoons were just the policemen of the time.'

'Yes. Mounted infantry.'

'Well, to me – and I suspect to every other person reading about it – dragoons sound dreadful. They've come to mean something that they never were.'

'Yes, I see. Force majeure in being. Actually the Government had only a tiny handful of men to police an enormous area, so the odds were all on the Covenanters' side. In more ways than one. A dragoon (read policeman) couldn't arrest anyone without a warrant (he couldn't stable his horse without the owner's permission, if it comes to that), but there was nothing to hinder a Covenanter lying snug in the heather and picking off dragoons at his leisure. Which they did, of course. And now there's a whole literature about the poor ill-used saint in the heather with his pistol; and the dragoon who died in the course of his duty is a Monster.'

'Like Richard.'

'Like Richard. How have you been getting on with our own particular Tonypandy?'

'Well, I still haven't managed to find out why Henry was so anxious to hush up that Act as well as repeal it. The thing was hushed-up and for years it was forgotten, until the original draft turned up, just by chance, in the Tower records. It was printed in 1611. Speed printed the full text of it in his *History of Great Britain*.'

'Oh. So there's no question at all about Titulus Regius. Richard succeeded as the Act says, and the sainted More's account is nonsense. There never was an Elizabeth Lucy in the matter.'

'Lucy? Who's Elizabeth Lucy?'

'Oh, I forgot. You weren't on in that act. According to the sainted More, Richard claimed that Edward was married to one of his mistresses, one Elizabeth Lucy.'

The disgusted look that the mention of the sainted More always caused on young Carradine's mild face made him look almost nauseated.

'That's nonsense.'

'So the sainted More smugly pointed out.'

'Why did they want to hide Eleanor Butler?' Carradine said, seeing the point.

'Because she really had married Edward, and the children really were illegitimate. And if the children really were illegitimate, by the way, then no one would rise in their favour and they were no danger to Richard. Have you noticed that the Woodville-Lancastrian invasion was in Henry's favour, and not in the boys' – although Dorset was their half-brother? And that was before any rumours of their non-existence could have reached him. As far as the leaders of the Dorset-Morton rebellion were concerned the boys were of no account. They were backing Henry. That way, Dorset would have a brother-in-law on the throne of England, and the Queen would be his half-sister. Which would be a nice reversal of form for a penniless fugitive.'

'Yes. Yes, that's a point, all right; that about Dorset not fighting to restore his half-brother. If there had been a chance at all that England would have accepted the boy, he surely would have backed the boy. I'll tell you another interesting thing I found. The Queen and her daughters came out of sanctuary quite soon. It's your talking about her son Dorset that reminded me. She not only came out of sanctuary but settled down as if nothing had happened. Her daughters went to festivities at the Palace. And do you know what the pay-off is?'

'No?'

'That was *after the Princes had been "murdered"*. Yes, and I'll tell you something else. With her two boys done to death by their wicked uncle, she writes to her other son, in France – Dorset – and asks him to come home and make his peace with Richard, who will treat him well.'

There was silence.

There were no sparrows to talk today. Only the soft sound of the rain against the window.

'No comment?' Carradine said at last.

'You know,' Grant said, 'from the police point of view there is no case against Richard at all. And I mean that literally. It isn't that the case isn't good enough. Good enough to bring into court, I mean. There, quite literally, isn't any case against him at all.'

'I'll say there isn't. Especially when I tell you that every single one of those people whose names you sent me were alive and prosperous, and free, when Richard was killed at Bosworth. They were not only free, they were very well cared for. Edward's children not only danced at the Palace, they had pensions. He appointed one of the crowd his heir when his own boy died.'

'Which one?'

'George's boy.'

'So he meant to reverse the attainder on his brother's children.'

'Yes. He had protested about his being condemned, if you remember.'

'According to even the sainted More, he did. So all the heirs to the throne of England were going about their business, free and unfettered, during the reign of Richard III, the Monster.'

'They were more. They were part of the general scheme of things. I mean, part of the family and the general economy of the realm. I've been reading a collection of York records by a man Davies. Records of the town of York, I mean; not the family. Both young Warwick – George's son – and his cousin, young Lincoln, were members of the Council. The town addressed a letter to them. In 1485, that was. What's more, Richard knighted young Warwick at the same time as he knighted his own son, at a splendid "do" at York.' He paused a long moment, and then blurted out: 'Mr Grant, do you want to write a book about this?'

'A book!' Grant said, astonished. 'God forbid. Why?'

'Because I should like to write one. It would make a much better book than the Peasants.'

Write away.

'You see, I'd like to have something to show my father. Pop thinks I'm no good because I can't take an interest in furniture, and marketing, and graphs of sales. If he could actually handle a book that I had written he might believe that I wasn't so hopeless a bet after all. In fact, I wouldn't put it past him to begin to boast about me for a change.'

Grant looked at him with benevolence.

'I forgot to ask you what you thought of Crosby Place,' he said.

'Oh, fine, fine. If Carradine the Third ever sees it he'll want to take it back with him and rebuild it in the Adirondacks somewhere.'

'If you write that book about Richard, he most certainly will. He'll feel like a part-owner. What are you going to call it?'

'The book?'

'Yes.'

'I'm going to borrow a phrase from Henry Ford, and call it *History is Bunk*.'

'Excellent.'

'However, I'll have a lot more reading to do and a lot more research, before I can start writing.'

'Most assuredly you have. You haven't arrived yet at the real question.'

'What is that?'

'Who did murder the boys.'

'Yes, of course.'

'If the boys were alive when Henry took over the Tower what happened to them?'

'Yes. I'll get on to that. I still want to know why it was so important to Henry to hush up the contents of Titulus Regius.'

He got up to go, and then noticed the portrait that was lying on its face on the table. He reached over and restored the photograph to its original place, propping it with a concerned care against the pile of books.

'You stay there,' he said to the painted Richard. 'I'm going to put you back where you belong.'

As he went out of the door, Grant said:

'I've just thought of a piece of history which is not Tonypandy.'

'Yes?' said Carradine, lingering.

'The massacre of Glencoe.'

'That really did happen?'

'That really did happen. And - Brent!' Brent put his head back inside the door. 'Yes?'

'The man who gave the order for it was an ardent Covenanter.'

Carradine had not been gone more than twenty minutes when Marta appeared, laden with flowers, books, candy, and goodwill. She found Grant deep in the fifteenth century as reported by Sir Cuthbert Oliphant. He greeted her with an absentmindedness to which she was not accustomed.

'If your two sons had been murdered by your brother-in-law, would you take a handsome pension from him?'

'I take it that the question is rhetorical,' Marta said, putting down her sheaf of flowers and looking round to see which of the already occupied vases would best suit their type.

'Honestly, I think historians are all mad. Listen to this:

The conduct of the Queen-Dowager is hard to explain; whether she feared to be taken from sanctuary by force, or whether she was merely tired of her forlorn existence at Westminster, and had resolved to be reconciled to the murderer of her sons out of mere callous apathy, seems uncertain.

'Merciful Heaven!' said Marta, pausing with a delft jar in one hand and a glass cylinder in the other, and looking at him in wild surmise.

'Do you think historians really listen to what they are saying?'

'Who was the said Queen-Dowager?'

'Elizabeth Woodville. Edward IV's wife.'

'Oh, yes. I played her once. It was a "bit". In a play about Warwick the Kingmaker.'

'Of course I'm only a policeman,' Grant said.

'Perhaps I never moved in the right circles. It may be that I've met only nice people. Where would one have to go to meet a woman who became matey with the murderer of her two boys?'

'Greece, I should think,' Marta said. 'Ancient Greece.'

'I can't remember a sample even there.'

'Or a lunatic asylum, perhaps. Was there any sign of idiocy about Elizabeth Woodville?'

'Not that anyone ever noticed. And she was Queen for twenty years or so.'

'Of course the thing is farce, I hope you see,' Marta said, going on with her flower arranging. 'Not a tragedy at all. "Yes, I know he did kill Edward and little Richard, but he really is a rather charming creature and it is so bad for my rheumatism living in rooms with a north light".'

Grant laughed, and his good temper came back.

'Yes, of course. It's the height of absurdity. It belongs to Ruthless Rhymes, not to sober history. That is why historians surprise me. They seem to have no talent for the *likeliness* of any situation. They see history like a peepshow; with two-dimensional figures against a distant background.'

'Perhaps when you are grubbing about with tattered records you haven't time to learn about people. I don't mean about the people in the records, but just about People. Flesh and blood. And how they react to circumstances.'

'How would you play her?' Grant asked, remembering that the understanding of motive was Marta's trade.

'Play who?'

'The woman who came out of sanctuary and made friends with her children's murderer for seven hundred merks per annum and the right to go to parties at the Palace.'

'I couldn't. There is no such woman outside Euripides or a delinquent's home. One could only play her as a rag. She'd make a very good burlesque, now I think of it. A take-off of poetic tragedy. The blank verse kind. I must try it sometime. For a charity matinée, or something. I hope you don't hate mimosa. It's odd, considering how long I've known you, how little I know of your likes and dislikes. Who invented the woman who became buddies with her sons' murderer?'

'No one invented her. Elizabeth Woodville did come out of sanctuary, and did accept a pension from Richard. The pension was not only granted, it was paid. Her daughters went to parties at the Palace and she wrote to her other son – her first-marriage son – to come home from France and make his peace with Richard. Oliphant's only suggestion as to the reason for this is that she was either frightened of being dragged out of sanctuary (did you ever know of anyone who was dragged out of sanctuary? The man who did that would be excommunicated – and Richard was a very good son of Holy Church) or that she was bored with sanctuary life.'

'And what is your theory about so odd a proceeding?'

'The obvious explanation is that the boys were alive and well. No one at that time ever suggested otherwise.'

Marta considered the sprays of mimosa. 'Yes, of course. You said that there was no accusation in that Bill of Attainder. After Richard's death, I mean.' Her eyes went from the mimosa to the portrait on the table and then to Grant. 'You think, then, you really soberly think, as a policeman, that Richard didn't have anything to do with the boys' deaths.'

'I'm quite sure that they were alive and well when Henry took over the Tower on his arrival in London. There is *nothing* that would explain his omission to make a scandal of it if the boys were missing. Can you think of anything?'

'No. No, of course not. It is quite inexplicable. I have always taken it for granted that there was a terrific scandal about it. That it would be one of the main accusations against Richard. You and my woolly lamb seem to be having a lovely time with history. When I suggested a little investigation to pass the time and stop the prickles I had no idea that I was contributing to the rewriting of history. Which reminds me, Atlanta Shergold is gunning for you.'

'For me? I've never even met her.'

'Nevertheless she is looking for you with a gun. She says that Brent's attitude to the B.M. has become the attitude of an addict to his drug. She can't drag him away from it. If she takes him away from it physically, he spends the time harking back to it in his mind; so that she mightn't exist as far as he is concerned. He has even stopped sitting through *To Sea in a Bowl*. Do you see much of him?'

'He was here a few minutes before you came. But I don't expect to hear from him again for some days to come.'

But in that he was wrong.

Just before supper-time the porter appeared with a telegram.

Grant put his thumb under the dainty Post Office lick on the flap and extracted two sheets of telegram. The telegram was from Brent.

Hell and damnation an awful thing has happened (stop) you know that chronicle in Latin I talked about (stop) the chronicle written by the monk at Croyland Abbey (stop) well I've just seen it and the rumour is there the rumour about the boys being dead (stop) the thing is written before Richard's death so we are sunk aren't we and I specially am sunk and that fine book of mine will never be written (stop) is anyone allowed to commit suicide in your river or is it reserved for the British.

Brent.

Into the silence the voice of the porter said: 'It's reply-paid, sir. Do you want to send an answer?'

'What? Oh. No. Not right away. I'll send it down presently.'

'Very good, sir,' said the porter looking respectfully at the two sheets of telegram - in the porter's family a telegram was confined to one sheet only - and went away, not humming this time.

Grant considered the news conveyed with such transatlantic extravagance in the matter of telegraphic communication. He read the thing again.

'Croyland,' he said, considering. Why did that ring a bell? No one had mentioned Croyland so far in this case. Carradine had talked merely of a monkish chronicle somewhere.

He had been too often, in his professional life, faced with a fact that apparently destroyed his whole case to be dismayed now. He reacted as he would have reacted in a professional investigation. He took out the upsetting small fact and looked at it. Calmly. Dispassionately. With none of poor Carradine's wild dismay.

'Croyland,' he said again. Croyland was somewhere in Cambridgeshire. Or was it Norfolk? Somewhere on the borders there, in the flat country.

The Midget came in with his supper, and propped the flat bowl-like plate where he could eat from it with a modicum of comfort, but he was not aware of her.

'Can you reach your pudding easily from there?' she asked. And as he did not answer: 'Mr Grant, can you reach your pudding if I leave it on the edge there?'

'Ely!' he shouted at her.

'What?'

'Ely,' he said; softly, to the ceiling.

'Mr Grant, aren't you feeling well?'

He became conscious of The Midget's well-powdered and concerned little face as it intruded between him and the familiar cracks.

'I'm fine, fine. Better than I've ever been in my life. Wait just a moment, there's a good girl, and send a telegram down for me. Give me my writing-pad. I can't reach it with that mess of rice pudding in the way.'

She gave him the pad and pencil, and on the reply-paid form he wrote:

Can you find me a similar rumour in France at about the same date?

Grant

After that he ate his supper with a good appetite, and settled down to a good night's sleep. He was floating in that delicious half-way stage on the way to unconsciousness when he became aware that someone was leaning over to inspect him. He opened his eyes to see who it might be, and looked straight into the anxious yearning brown irises of The Amazon, looking larger and more cowlike than ever in the soft lamplight. She was holding in her hand a yellow envelope.

'I didn't quite know what to do,' she said. 'I didn't want to disturb you and yet I didn't know whether it mightn't be important. A telegram, you know. You never can tell. And if you didn't have it tonight it would mean a whole twelve hours' delay. Nurse Ingham has gone off duty, so there was no one to ask till Nurse Briggs comes on at ten. I hope I haven't wakened you up. But you weren't asleep, were you?'

Grant assured her that she had done the right thing and she let out a sigh that nearly blew the portrait of Richard over. She stood by while he read the telegram, with an air of being ready to support him in any evil news that it might contain. To The Amazon all telegrams conveyed evil tidings.

The telegram was from Carradine.

It said: 'You mean you want repeat want that there should be another repeat another accusation question mark – Brent.' Grant took the reply-paid form and wrote: 'Yes. Preferably in France.'

Then he said to The Amazon: 'You can turn out the light, I think. I'm going to sleep until seven tomorrow morning.'

He fell asleep wondering how long it would be before he saw Carradine again, and what the odds were against that much desired instance of a second rumour.

But it was not so long after all until Carradine turned up again, and he turned up looking anything but suicidal. Indeed he seemed in some queer way to have broadened out. His coat seemed less of an appendage and more of a garment. He beamed at Grant.

'Mr Grant, you're a wonder. Do they have more like you at Scotland Yard? Or do you rate special?'

Grant looked at him almost unbelieving. 'Don't tell me you've turned up a French instance!'

'Didn't you want me to?'

'Yes. But I hardly dared hope for it. The odds against seemed tremendous. What form did the rumour take in France? A chronicle? A letter?'

'No. Something much more surprising. Something much more dismaying, actually. It seems that the Chancellor of France, in a speech to the States-General at Tours, spoke of the rumour. Indeed he was quite eloquent about it. In a way, his eloquence was the one scrap of comfort I could find in the situation.'

'Why?'

'Well, it sounded more to my mind like a Senator being hasty about someone who had brought in a measure his own people back home wouldn't like. More like politics than State, if you know what I mean.'

'You should be at the Yard, Brent, What did the Chancellor say?'

'Well, it's in French and my French isn't very good so perhaps you'd better read it for yourself.'

He handed over a sheet of his childish writing and Grant read:

Regardez, je vous prie, les événements qui après la mort du roi Edouard sont arrivés dans ce pays. Contemplez ses enfants, déjà grands et braves, massacrés impunément, et la couronne transportée a l'assassin par la faveur des peuples. "Ce pays",' said Grant. 'Then he was in full flood against England. He even suggests that it was with the will of the English people that the boys were "massacred". We are being held up as a barbarous race.'

'Yes. That's what I meant. It's a Congressman scoring a point. Actually, the French Regency sent an embassy to Richard that same year – about six months later – so they had probably found that the rumour wasn't true. Richard signed a safe-conduct for their visit. He wouldn't have done that if they had been still slanging him as a murdering untouchable.'

'No. Can You give me the dates of the two libels?'

'Sure. I have them here. The monk at Croyland wrote about events in the late summer of 1483. He says that there was a rumour that the boys had been put to death but no one knew how. The nasty slap in the meeting of the States-General was in January 1484.'

'Perfect,' said Grant.

'Why did you want there to have been another instance of rumour?'

'As a cross-check. Do you know where Croyland is?'

'Yes. In the Fen country.'

'In the Fen country. Near Ely. And it was in the Fen country that Morton was hiding out after his escape from Buckingham's charge.'

'Morton! Yes, of course.'

'If Morton was the carrier, then there had to be another outbreak on the Continent, when he moved on there. Morton escaped from England in the autumn of 1483, and the rumour appears promptly in January 1484. Croyland is a very isolated place, incidentally, it would be an ideal place for a fugitive bishop to hide-out till he could arrange transport abroad.'

'Morton!' said Carradine again, rolling the name over on his tongue. 'Wherever there's hanky-panky in this business you stub your toe against Morton.'

'So vou've noticed that too."

'He was the heart of that conspiracy to murder Richard before he could be crowned, he was in back of the rebellion against Richard once he was crowned, and his trail to the Continent is sticky as a snail's with – with subversion.'

'Well, the snail part is mere deduction. It wouldn't stand up in court. But there's no peradventure about his activities once he was across the channel. He settled down to a whole-time job of subversion. He and a buddy of his called Christopher Urswick worked like beavers in Henry's interest; "sending preuie letters and cloked messengers" to England to stir up hostility to Richard.'

'Yes? I don't know as much as you about what stands up in court and what won't, but it seems to me that that snail's trail is a very allowable deduction – if you'll allow me. I don't suppose Morton waited till he was overseas before beginning his undermining.'

'No. No, of course he didn't. It was life and death to Morton that Richard should go. Unless Richard went, John Morton's career was over. He was finished. It wasn't even that there would be no preferment for him now. There would be nothing. He would be stripped of his numerous livings and be reduced to his plain priest's frock. He, John Morton. Who had been

within touching distance of an archbishopric. But if he could help Henry Tudor to a throne then he might still become not only Archbishop of Canterbury but a Cardinal besides. Oh, yes; it was desperately, overwhelmingly important to Morton that Richard should not have the governing of England.'

'Well,' said Brent, 'he was the right man for a job of subversion. I don't suppose he knew what a scruple was. A little rumour like infanticide must have been child's play to him.'

'There's always the odd chance that he believed it, of course,' Grant said, his habit of weighing evidence overcoming even his dislike of Morton.

'Believed that the boys were murdered?'

'Yes. It may have been someone else's invention. After all, the country must have been swarming with Lancastrian tales, part mere ill-will, part propaganda. He may have been merely passing on the latest sample.'

'Huh! I wouldn't put it past him to be paving the way for their future murder,' Brent said tartly.

Grant laughed. 'I wouldn't, at that,' he said. 'What else did you get from your monk at Croyland?'

'A little comfort, too. I found after I had written that panic wire to you that he wasn't at all to be taken as gospel. He just put down what gossip came his way from the outer world. He says, for instance, that Richard had a second coronation, at York; and that of course just isn't true. If he can be wrong about a big, known, fact like a coronation, then he's not to be trusted as a reporter. But he did know about Titulus Regius, by the way. He recorded the whole tenor of it, including Lady Eleanor.'

'That's interesting. Even a monk at Croyland had heard who Edward was supposed to have been married to.'

'Yes. The sainted More must have dreamed up Elizabeth Lucy a good deal later.'

'To say nothing of the unspeakable story that Richard based his claim on his mother's shame.'

'What?'

'He says that Richard caused a sermon to be preached claiming that Edward and George were his mother's sons by some other father, and that he, Richard, was the only legitimate son and therefore the only true heir.'

'The sainted More might have thought up a more convincing one,' young Carradine said dryly.

'Yes. Especially when Richard was living in his mother's house at the time of the libel!'

'So he was. I'd forgotten that. I don't have a proper police brain. That's very neat, what you say about Morton being the carrier of the rumour. But suppose the rumour turns up somewhere else, even yet.'

'It's possible, of course. But I'm willing to lay you fifties to any amount that it won't. I don't for one moment believe that there was any general rumour that the boys were missing.'

'Why not?'

'For a reason that I hold to be unanswerable. If there had been any general uneasiness, any obviously subversive rumours or action, Richard would have taken immediate steps to checkmate them. When the rumours went round, later, that he was proposing to marry his niece Elizabeth – the boys' eldest sister – he was on to it like a hawk. He not only sent letters to the various towns denying the rumour in no uncertain terms, he was so furious (and evidently thought of it such importance that he should not be traduced) that he summoned the "heid yins" of London to the biggest hall he could find (so that he could get them all in at one time) and told them face to face what he thought about the affair.'

'Yes. Of course you're right. Richard would have made a public denial of the rumour if the rumour was general. After all, it was a much more horrifying one than the one that he was going to marry his niece.'

'Yes; actually you could get a dispensation to marry your niece in those days. Perhaps you still can, for all I know. That's not my department at the Yard. What is certain is that if Richard went to such lengths to contradict the marriage rumour then he most certainly would have gone to much greater lengths to put a stop to the murder one, if it had existed. The conclusion is inevitable: there was no general rumour of disappearance or foul play where the boys were concerned.'

'Just a thin little trickle between the Fens and France.'

'Just a thin little trickle between the Fens and France. Nothing in the picture suggests any worry about the boys. I mean: in a police investigation you look for any abnormalities in behaviour among the suspects in a crime. Why did X, who always goes to the movies on a Thursday night, decide on that night of all nights not to go? Why did Y take a return half as usual and very unusually not use it? That sort of thing. But in the short time between Richard's succession and his death everyone behaves quite normally. The boys' mother comes out of sanctuary and makes her peace with Richard. The girls resume their court life. The boys are presumably still doing the lessons that their father's death had interrupted. Their young cousins have a place on the Council and are of sufficient importance for the town of York to be addressing letters to them. It's all quite a normal, peaceful scene, with everyone going about their ordinary business, and no suggestion anywhere that a spectacular and unnecessary murder has just taken place in the family.'

'It looks as if I might write that book after all, Mr Grant.'

'Most certainly you will write it. You have not only Richard to rescue from calumny; you have to clear Elizabeth Woodville of the imputation of condoning her sons' murder for seven hundred merks a year and perks.'

'I can't write the book and leave it in the air like that, of course. I'll have to have at least a theory as to what became of the boys.'

'You will.'

Carradine's mild gaze came away from the small woolly clouds over the Thames and considered Grant with a question in it.

"Why that tone?" he asked. "Why are you looking like a cat with cream?"

'Well, I've been proceeding along police lines. During those empty days while I was waiting for you to turn up again.'

'Police lines?'

'Yes. Who benefits, and all that. We've discovered that it wouldn't be a pin's-worth of advantage to Richard that the boys should die. So we go on looking round to see who, in that case, it *would* benefit. And this is where Titulus Regius comes in.'

'What has Titulus Regius got to do with the murder?'

'Henry VII married the boys' eldest sister. Elizabeth.'

'Vec

'By way of reconciling the Yorkists to his occupation of the throne.'

'Yes.'

'By repealing Titulus Regius, he made her legitimate.'

'Sure.'

'But by making the children legitimate he automatically made the two boys heir to the throne before her. In fact, by repealing Titulus Regius he made the elder of the two King of England.'

Carradine made a little clicking sound with his tongue. His eyes behind their horn-rims were glowing with pleasure.

'So,' said Grant, 'I propose that we proceed with investigation along those lines.'

'Sure. What do you want?'

'I want to know a lot more about that confession of Tyrrel's. But first, and most of all, I'd like to know how the people concerned acted. What happened to them; not what anyone reported of anyone. Just as we did in the case of Richard's succession after Edward's unexpected death.'

'Fine. What do you want to know?'

'I want to know what became of all the York heirs that Richard left so alive and well and prosperous. Every single one of them. Can you do that for me?'

'Sure. That's elementary.'

'And I could bear to know more about Tyrrel.'

'About the man himself, I mean. Who he was, and what he had done.'

'I'll do that.' Carradine got up with such an on-with-the-charge air that for one moment Grant thought that he was actually going to button his coat. 'Mr Grant, I'm so grateful to you for all this – this – '

'This fun and games?'

'When you're on your feet again, I'll - I'll - I'll take you round the Tower of London.'

'Make it Greenwich-and-back by boat. Our island Race have a passion for the nautical.'

'How long do they reckon it will be before you're out of bed, do you know?'

'I'll probably be up before you come back with the news about the heirs and Tyrrel.'

Grant was not, as it happened, out of bed when Carradine came again, but he was sitting up.

'You can't imagine,' he said to Brent, 'how fascinating the opposite wall looks, after the ceiling. And how small and queer the world looks right way up.'

He was touched by Carradine's obvious pleasure in this progress and it was some time before they got down to business. It was Grant who had to say: 'Well, how did the York heirs make out under Henry VII?'

'Oh, yes,' said the boy, pulling out his usual wad of notes and drawing up a chair by hooking his right toe in the crossbar. He sat down on the chair. 'Where shall I begin?'

'Well, about Elizabeth we know. He married her, and she was Queen of England until she died and he made a bid for the mad Juana of Spain.'

'Yes. She was married to Henry in the spring of 1486 – in January, rather; five months after Bosworth – and she died in the spring of 1503.'

'Seventeen years. Poor Elizabeth. With Henry it must have seemed like seventy. He was what is euphemistically referred to as "unuxorious". Let us go on down the family. Edward's children, I mean. Fate of the two boys unknown. What happened to Cecily?'

'She was married to his old uncle Lord Welles, and sent away to live in Lincolnshire. Anne and Katherine, who were children, were married when they were old enough to good Lancastrians. Bridget, the youngest, became a nun at Dartford.'

'Orthodox enough, so far. Who comes next? George's boy.'

'Yes. Young Warwick. Shut up for life in the Tower, and executed for allegedly planning to escape.'

'So. And George's daughter? Margaret.'

'She became the Countess of Salisbury. Her execution by Henry VIII on a trumped-up charge is apparently the classic sample of judicial murder.'

'Elizabeth's son? The alternative heir?'

'John de la Pole. He went to live with his aunt in Burgundy until -'

'To live with Margaret, Richard's sister.'

'Yes. He died in the Simnel rising. But he had a younger brother that you didn't put in that list. He was executed by Henry VIII. He had surrendered to Henry VII under a safe-conduct, so Henry, I suppose, thought that it might break his luck to ignore that. In any case he had about used up his quota. Henry VIII took no chances. He didn't stop at de la Pole. There were four more that you missed out of that list. Exeter, Surrey, Buckingham, and Montague. He got rid of the lot.'

'And Richard's son? John? The bastard one.'

'Henry VII granted him a pension of £20 a year, but he was the first of the lot to go.'

'On what charge?'

'On having been suspected of receiving an invitation to go to Ireland.'

'You're joking.'

'I'm not. Ireland was the focus of loyalist rebellion. The York family were very popular in Ireland, and to get an invitation from that direction was as good as a death warrant in Henry's eyes. Though I can't think why even Henry would have bothered about young John. "An active, well-disposed boy", he was, by the way, according to the *Foedera*.'

'His claim was better than Henry's.' Grant said, very tart. 'He was the illegitimate only son of a King. Henry was the great-grandson of an illegitimate son of a younger son of a King.'

There was silence for some time.

Then Carradine, out of the silence, said: 'Yes.'

'Yes to what?'

'To what you are thinking.'

'It does look like it, doesn't it. They're the only two who are missing from the list.'

There was another silence.

'They were all judicial murders,' Grant said presently. 'Murders under the form of law. But you can't bring a capital charge against a pair of children.'

'No,' agreed Carradine, and went on watching the sparrows. 'No, it would have to be done some other way. After all, they were the important ones.'

'The vital ones.'

'How do we start?'

'As we did with Richard's succession. Find out where everyone was in the first months of Henry's reign and what they were doing. Say the first year of his reign. There will be a break in the pattern somewhere, just as there was a break in the preparations for the boy's coronation.'

'Right.'

Did you find out anything about Tyrrel? Who he was?'

'Yes. He wasn't at all what I had imagined. I'd imagined him as a sort of hanger-on; hadn't you?'

'Yes, I think I did. Wasn't he?'

'No. He was a person of importance. He was Sir James Tyrrel of Gipping. He had been on various – committees, I suppose you'd call them, for Edward IV. And he was created a Knight Banneret, whatever that is, at the siege of Berwick. And he did well for himself under Richard, though I can't find that he was at the battle of Bosworth. A lot of people came too late for the battle – did you know? – so I don't suppose that means anything particular. Anyhow, he wasn't that lackey-on-the-make person that I'd always pictured.'

'That's interesting. How did he make out under Henry VII?'

'Well, that's the really interesting thing. For such a very good and successful servant of the York family, he seems to have fairly blossomed under Henry. Henry appointed him Constable of Guisnes. Then he was sent as ambassador to Rome. He was one of the Commissioners for negotiating the Treaty of Etaples. And Henry gave him a grant for life of the revenues of some lands in Wales, but made him exchange them for revenues of the county of Guisnes of equal value – I can't think why.'

'I can,' said Grant.

'You can?'

'Has it struck you that all his honours and his commissions are outside England? Even the reward of land revenues.'

'Yes, so they are. What does that convey to you?'

'Nothing at the moment. Perhaps he just found Guisnes better for his bronchial catarrh. It is possible to read too much into historical transactions. Like Shakespeare's plays, they are capable of almost endless interpretations. How long did this honeymoon with Henry VII last?'

'Oh, quite a long time. Everything was just grand until 1502.'

'What happened in 1502?'

'Henry heard that he had been ready to help one of the York crowd in the Tower to escape to Germany. He sent the whole garrison of Calais to besiege the castle at Guisnes. That wasn't quick enough for him, so he sent his Lord Privy Seal – know what that is?'

Grant nodded

'Sent his Lord Privy Seal – what names you English have dreamed up for your Elks officials – to offer him safe conduct if he would come aboard a ship at Calais and confer with the Chancellor of the Exchequer.'

'Don't tell me

'I don't need to, do I? He finished up in a dungeon in the Tower. And was beheaded "in great haste and without trial" on May 6th 1503.'

'And what about his confession?'

'There wasn't one.'

'What!'

'Don't look at me like that. I'm not responsible.'

'But I thought he confessed to the murder of the boys.'

'Yes, according to various accounts. But they are accounts of a confession, not – not a transcript, if you see what I mean.'

'You mean, Henry didn't publish a confession?'

'No. His paid historian, Polydore Virgil, gave an account of how the murder was done. After Tyrrel was dead.'

'But if Tyrrel confessed that he murdered the boys at Richard's instigation, why wasn't he charged with the crime and publicly tried for it?'

'I can't imagine.'

'Let me get this straight. Nothing was heard of Tyrrel's confession until Tyrrel was dead.'

'No.'

'Tyrrel confesses that, way back in 1483, nearly twenty years ago, he pelted up to London from Warwick, got the keys of the Tower from the Constable – I forget his name –'

'Brackenbury. Sir Robert Brackenbury.'

'Yes. Got the keys of the Tower from Sir Robert Brackenbury for one night, murdered the boys, handed back the keys, and reported back to Richard. He confesses this, and so puts an end to what must have been a much canvassed mystery, and yet nothing public is done with him.'

'Not a thing.'

'I'd hate to go into court with a story like that.'

'I wouldn't even consider it, myself. It's as phoney a tale as ever I heard.'

'Didn't they even bring Brackenbury in to affirm or deny the story of the keys being handed over?'

'Brackenbury was killed at Bosworth.'

'So he was conveniently dead too, was he.' He lay and thought about it.'You know, if Brackenbury died at Bosworth, then we have one more small piece of evidence on our side.'

'How? What?

'If that had really happened; I mean: if the keys were handed over for a night on Richard's order, then a lot of junior officials at the Tower must have been aware of it. It is quite inconceivable that one or other of them wouldn't be ready to tell the tale to Henry when he took over the Tower. Especially if the boys were missing. Brackenbury was dead. Richard was dead. The next in command at the Tower would be expected to produce the boys. When they weren't producible, he must have said: "The Constable handed over the keys, one night, and since then the boys have not been seen." There would have been the most ruthless hue and cry after the man who had been given the keys. He would have been Exhibit A in the case against Richard, and to produce him would have been a feather in Henry's cap.'

'Not only that, but Tyrrel was too well known to the people at the Tower to have passed unrecognised. In the small London of that day he must have been quite a well-known figure.'

'Yes. If that story were true Tyrrel would have been tried and executed for the boys' murder, openly, in 1485. He had no one to protect him.' He reached for his cigarettes. 'So what we're left with is that Henry executed Tyrrel in 1502, and then announced by way of his tame historians that Tyrrel had confessed that twenty years before he had murdered the Princes.

'Yes.

'And he didn't offer, anywhere, at any time, any reason for not trying Tyrrel for this atrocious thing he had confessed.'

'No. Not as far as I can make out. He was sideways as a crab, you know. He never went straight at anything, even murder. It had to be covered up to look like something else. He waited years to find some sort of legal excuse that would camouflage a murder. He had a mind like a corkscrew. Do you know what his first official action as Henry VII was?'

'No.'

'To execute some of the men fighting for Richard at Bosworth on a charge of treason. And do you know how he managed to make it legally treason? By dating his reign from the day before Bosworth. A mind that was capable of a piece of sharp practice of that calibre was capable of anything.' He took the cigarette that Grant was offering him. 'But he didn't get away with it,' he added, with sober joy. 'Oh, no, he didn't get away with it. The English, bless them, drew the line at that. They told him where he got off.'

'How?'

'They presented him, in that nice polite English way, with an Act of Parliament that said that no one serving the Sovereign Lord of the land for the time being should be convicted of treason or suffer either forfeiture or imprisonment, and they made him consent to it. That's terribly English, that ruthless politeness. No yelling in the street or throwing stones because they didn't like his little bit of cheating. Just a nice polite reasonable Act for him to swallow and like it. I bet he did a slow burn about that one. Well, I must be on my way. It's sure nice to see you sitting up and taking notice. We'll be having that trip to Greenwich in no time at all, I see. What's at Greenwich?'

'Some very fine architecture and a fine stretch of muddy river.'

'That's all?'

'And some good pubs.'

'We're going to Greenwich.'

When he had gone Grant slid down in bed and smoked one cigarette after another while he considered the tale of those heirs of York who had prospered under Richard III, and gone to their graves under Henry VII.

Some of them may have 'asked for it'. Carradine's report had, after all, been a précis; innocent of qualification, insusceptible to half-tones. But it was surely a thundering great coincidence that all the lives who stood between the Tudors and the throne had been cut short so conveniently.

He looked, with no great enthusiasm, at the book that young Carradine had brought him. It was called *The Life and Reign of Richard III*; by someone James Gairdner. Carradine had assured him that he would find Dr Gairdner well worth his while. Dr Gairdner was, according to Brent, 'a yell'.

The book did not appear to Grant to be markedly hilarious, but anything about Richard was better than something about anyone else, so he began to glance through it, and presently he became aware just what Brent had meant by saying that the good doctor was a 'yell'. Dr Gairdner obstinately believed Richard to be a murderer, but since he was a writer honest, learned, and according to his lights impartial, it was not in him to suppress facts. The spectacle of Dr Gairdner trying to make his facts fit his theory was the most entertaining thing in gymnastics that Grant had witnessed for some time.

Dr Gairdner acknowledged with no apparent sense of incongruity Richard's great wisdom, his generosity, his courage, his ability, his charm, his popularity, and the trust that he inspired even in his beaten enemies; and in the same breath reported his vile slander of his mother and his slaughter of two helpless children. Tradition says, said the worthy Doctor; and solemnly reported the horrible tradition and subscribed to it. There was nothing mean or paltry in his character, according to the Doctor – but he was a murderer of innocent children. Even his enemies had confidence in his justice – but he murdered his own nephews. His integrity was remarkable – but he killed for gain.

As a contortionist Dr Gairdner was the original boneless wonder. More than ever Grant wondered with what part of their brains historians reasoned. It was certainly by no process of reasoning known to ordinary mortals that they arrived at their

conclusions. Nowhere in the pages of fiction or fact, and certainly nowhere in life, had he met any human being remotely resembling either Dr Gairdner's Richard or Oliphant's Elizabeth Woodville.

Perhaps there was something in Laura's theory that human nature found it difficult to give up preconceived beliefs. That there was some vague inward opposition to, and resentment of, a reversal of accepted fact. Certainly Dr Gairdner dragged like a frightened child on the hand that was pulling him towards the inevitable.

That charming men of great integrity had committed murder in their day Grant knew only too well. But not that kind of murder and not for that kind of reason. The kind of man whom Dr Gairdner had drawn in his *Life and History of Richard III* would commit murder only when his own personal life had been bouleversé by some earthquake. He would murder his wife for unfaithfulness suddenly discovered, perhaps. Or kill the partner whose secret speculation had ruined their firm and the future of his children. Whatever murder he committed would be the result of acute emotion, it would never be planned: and it would never be a base murder.

One could not say: Because Richard possessed this quality and that, therefore he was incapable of murder. But one could say: Because Richard possessed these qualities, therefore he is incapable of this murder.

It would have been a silly murder, that murder of the boy Princes; and Richard was a remarkably able man. It was base beyond description; and he was a man of great integrity. It was callous; and he was noted for his warm-heartedness.

One could go through the catalogue of his acknowledged virtues, and find that each of them, individually, made his part in the murder unlikely in the extreme. Taken together they amounted to a wall of impossibility that towered into fantasy.

'There was one person you forgot to ask for,' Carradine said, breezing in, very gay, some days later, 'in your list of kind inquiries.'

'Hullo, Who was that?'

'Stillington.'

'Of course! The worthy Bishop of Bath. If Henry hated Titulus Regius, as a witness of Richard's integrity and his own wife's illegitimacy, he must still more have disliked the presence of its instigator. What happened to old Stillington? Judicial murder?'

'Apparently the old boy wouldn't play.'

'Wouldn't play what?'

'Henry's pet game. Out goes he. Either he was a wily old bird, or he was too innocent to see the snare at all. It's my belief – if a mere Research Worker is entitled to a belief – that he was so innocent that no agent provocateur could provoke him to anything. Not anything that could be made a capital charge, anyhow.'

'Are you telling me that he defeated Henry?'

'No. Oh, no. No one ever defeated Henry. Henry put him on a charge and conveniently forgot to release him. And never home came he. Who was that? Mary on the sands of Dee?'

'You're very bright this morning, not to say exhilarated.'

'Don't say it in that suspicious tone. They're not open yet. This effervescence that you observe in me is intellectual carbonisation. Spiritual rejoicing. An entirely cerebral scintillation.'

'Well? Sit down and cough up. What is so good? I take it that something is?'

'Good is hardly the proper word. It's beautiful, perfectly-holy beautiful.'

'I think you have been drinking.'

'I couldn't drink this morning if I tried. I'm bung full, full up to the gullet's edge, with satisfaction.'

'I take it you found that break in the pattern we were looking for.'

'Yes, I found it, but it was later than we had thought. Later in time, I mean. Further on. In the first months everyone did what you would expect them to do. Henry took over – not a word about the boys – and cleaned up, got married to the boys' sister. Got his own attainder reversed by a Parliament of his own attainted followers – no mention of the boys – and got an act of attainder through against Richard and his loyal subjects whose service was so neatly made treason by that one day's ante-dating. That brought a fine heap of forfeited estates into the kitty in one go. The Croyland monk was terribly scandalised, by the way, at Henry's sharp practice in the matter of treason. "O God," he says, "what security are our kings to have henceforth in the day of battle if their loyal followers may in defeat be deprived of life, fortune, and inheritance".'

'He reckoned without his countrymen.'

'Yes. He might have known that the English would get round to that matter sooner or later. Perhaps he was an alien. Anyhow, everything went on just as you would expect things to go with Henry in charge. He succeeded in August of 1485, and married Elizabeth the following January. Elizabeth had her first child at Winchester, and her mother was there with her and was present at the baptism. That was in September 1486. Then she came back to London – the Queen Dowager, I mean – in the autumn. And in February – hold on to everything – in February she was shut in a convent for the rest of her life.'

'Elizabeth Woodville?' Grant said, in the greatest astonishment. This was the very last thing he had expected.

'Yes. Elizabeth Woodville. The boys' mother.'

'How do you know that she didn't go voluntarily?' Grant asked, when he had thought of it for a little. 'It was not an uncommon thing for great ladies who were tired of court life to retire into an Order. It was not a severe existence, you know. Indeed, I have an idea it was fairly comfortable for rich women.'

'Henry stripped her of everything she owned, and ordered her into the nunnery at Bermondsey. And that, by the way, *did* create a sensation. There was "much wondering", it appears.'

'I'm not surprised. What an extraordinary thing. Did he give a reason?'

'Yes.'

'What did he say he was ruining her for?'

'For being nice to Richard.'

'Are you serious?'

'Sure.'

'Is that the official wording?'

'No. That's the version of Henry's pet historian.'

'Virgil?'

'Yes. The actual order of council that shut her up, said it was "for various considerations".'

'Are you quoting?' asked Grant, incredulous. 'I'm quoting. That's what it said: "For various considerations".'

After a moment Grant said: 'He had no talent for excuses, had he? In his place I would have thought up six better ones.'

'Either he couldn't be bothered or he thought other people very credulous. Mark you, her niceness to Richard didn't worry him until eighteen months after he succeeded Richard. Up till then everything had apparently been smooth as milk. He had even given her presents, manors and what not, when he succeeded Richard.'

'What was his real reason? Have you any suggestion?'

'Well, I've another little item that may give you ideas. It certainly gave me one hell of a big idea.'

'Go on.'

'In June of that year -'

'Which year?'

'The first year of Elizabeth's marriage. 1486. The year when she was married in January and had Prince Arthur at Winchester in September, with her mother dancing attendance.'

'All right. Yes.'

'In June of that year, Sir James Tyrrel received a general pardon. On the 16th June.'

'But that means very little, you know. It was quite a usual thing. At the end of a period of service. Or on setting out on a new one. It merely meant that you were quit of anything that anyone might think of raking up against you afterwards.'

'Yes, I know. I know that. The first pardon isn't the surprising one.'

'The first pardon? Was there a second one?'

'Yes. That's the pay-off. There was a second general pardon to Sir James exactly a month later. To be exact on the 16th July, 1486.'

'Yes,' Grant said, thinking it over. 'That really is extraordinary.'

'It's highly unusual, anyway. I asked an old boy who works next me at the B.M. – he does historical research and he's been a wonderful help to me I don't mind telling you – and he said he had never come across another instance. I showed him the two entries – in the *Memorials of Henry VII* – and he mooned over them like a lover.'

Grant said, considering: 'On the 16th June, Tyrrel is given a general pardon. On the 16th July he is given a second general pardon. In November or thereabouts the boys' mother comes back to town. And in February she is immured for life.'

'Suggestive?'

'Very.'

'You think he did it? Tyrrel.'

'It could be. It's very suggestive, isn't it, that when we find the break in the normal pattern that we've been looking for, Tyrrel is there, on the spot, with a most unconscionable break in his own pattern. When did the rumour that the boys were missing first become general? I mean, something to be talked openly about.'

'Quite early in Henry's reign, it would seem.'

'Yes; it fits. It would certainly explain the thing that has puzzled us from the beginning in this affair.'

'What do you mean?'

'It would explain why there was no fuss when the boys disappeared. It's always been a puzzling thing, even to people who thought that Richard did it. Indeed, when you come to think of it it would be impossible for Richard to get away with it. There was a large, and very active, and very powerful opposition party in Richard's day, and he left them all free and scattered up and down the country to carry on as they liked. He had all the Woodville-Lancaster crowd to deal with if the boys had gone missing. But where interference or undue curiosity was concerned Henry was sitting pretty. Henry had got his opposition party safely in jail. The only possible danger was his mother-in-law, and at the very moment when she becomes capable of being a prying nuisance she too is put under hatches and battened down.'

'Yes. Wouldn't you think that there was *something* she could have done? When she found that she was being prevented from getting news of the boys.'

'She may never have known that they were missing. He may just have said:"It is my wish that you should not see them. I think you are a bad influence on them: you who came out of sanctuary and let your daughters go to that man's parties!"

'Yes, that's so, of course. He didn't have to wait until she actually became suspicious. The whole thing might have been one move. "You're a bad woman, and a bad mother; I am sending you into a convent to save your soul and your children from the contamination of your presence".'

'Yes. And where the rest of England were concerned, he was as safe as any murderer ever could be. After his happy thought about the "treason" accusation, no one was going to stick his neck out by inquiring particularly about the boys' health. Everyone must have been walking on eggs as it was. No one knowing what Henry might think of next to make into a retrospective offence that would send their lives into limbo and their estates into Henry's kitty. No, it was no time to be over-curious about anything that didn't directly concern oneself. Not that it would be easy, in any case, to satisfy one's curiosity.'

'With the boys living at the Tower, you mean.'

'With the boys living in a Tower officialled by Henry's men. There was none of Richard's get-together live-and-let-live attitude about Henry. No York-Lancaster alliance for Henry. The people at the Tower would be Henry's men.'

'Yes. Of course they would. Did you know that Henry was the first English King to have a bodyguard? I wonder what he told his wife about her brothers.'

'Yes. That would be interesting to know. He may even have told her the truth.'

'Henry! Never! It would cost Henry a spiritual struggle, Mr Grant, to acknowledge that two and two were four. I tell you, he was a crab; he never went straight at anything.'

'If he were sadist he could tell her with impunity, you know. There was practically nothing she could do about it. Even if she wanted to. She mightn't have wanted to all that much. She had just produced an heir to the throne of England and was getting ready to produce another. She might not have the spare interest for a crusade; especially a crusade that would knock the ground from under her own feet.'

'He wasn't a sadist, Henry,' young Carradine said sadly. Sad at having to grant Henry even a negative virtue. 'In a way he was just the opposite. He didn't enjoy murder at all. He had to pretty it before he could bear the thought of it. Dress it up in legal ribbons. If you think that Henry got a kick out of boasting to Elizabeth in bed about what he had done with her brothers, I think you're wrong.'

'Yes, probably,' Grant said. And lay thinking about Henry. 'I've just thought of the right adjective for Henry,' he said presently. 'Shabby. He was a shabby creature.'

'Yes. Even his hair was thin and scanty.'

'I didn't mean it physically.'

'I know you didn't.'

'Everything that he did was shabby. Come to think of it, "Morton's Fork" is the shabbiest piece of revenue-raising in history. But it wasn't only his greed for money. Everything about him is shabby, isn't it?'

'Yes. Dr Gairdner wouldn't have any trouble in making his actions fit his character. How did you get on with the Doctor?'

'A fascinating study. But for the grace of God I think the worthy Doctor might have made a living as a criminal.'

'Because he cheated?'

'Because he didn't cheat. He was as honest as the day. He just couldn't reason from B to C.'

'All right, I'll buy.'

'Everyone can reason from A to B – even a child. And most adults can reason from B to C. But a lot can't. Most criminals can't. You may not believe it – I know it's an awful come-down from the popular conception of the criminal as a dashing and cute character – but the criminal mind is an essentially silly one. You can't imagine how silly sometimes. You'd have to experience it to believe their lack of reasoning powers. They arrive at B, but they're quite incapable of making the jump to C. They'll lay two completely incompatible things side by side and contemplate them with the most unquestioning content. You can't make them see that they can't have both, any more than you can make a man of no taste see that bits of plywood nailed on to a gable to simulate Tudor beams are impossible. Have you started your own book?'

'Well – I've made a sort of tentative beginning. I know the way I want to write it. I mean the form. I hope you won't mind.'

'I want to write it the way it happened. You know; about my coming to see you, and our starting the Richard thing quite casually and not knowing what we were getting into, and how we stuck to things that actually happened and not what someone reported afterwards about it, and how we looked for the break in the normal pattern that would indicate where the mischief was, like bubbles coming up from a diver way below, and that sort of thing.'

'I think it's a grand idea.'

'You do?'

'I do indeed.'

'Well, that's fine, then. I'll get on with it. I'm going to do some research on Henry, just as garnish. I'd like to be able to put their actual records side by side, you see. So that people can compare them for themselves. Did you know that Henry invented the Star Chamber?'

'Was it Henry? I'd forgotten that. Morton's Fork and the Star Chamber. The classic sample of sharp practice, and the classic sample of tyranny. You're not going to have any difficulty in differentiating the rival portraits, are you! Morton's Fork and the Star Chamber make a nice contrast to the granting of the right to bail, and the prevention of the intimidation of juries.'

'Was that Richard's Parliament? Golly, what a lot of reading I have to do. Atlanta's not speaking to me. She hates your marrow. She says I'm about as much use to a girl as a last year's *Vogue*. But honestly, Mr Grant, this is the first time in my life that anything exciting has happened to me. Important, I mean. Not exciting meaning exciting. Atlanta's exciting. She's all the excitement I ever want. But neither of us is important, the way I mean important – if you can understand what I mean.'

'Yes, I understand. You've found something worth doing.'

'That's it. I've found something worth doing. And it's me that's going to do it; that's what's wonderful about it. Me. Mrs Carradine's little boy. I come over here with Atlanta, with no idea about anything but using that research gag as an alibi. I walk into the B.M. to get me some dope to keep Pop quiet, and I walk out with a mission. Doesn't that shake you!' He eyed Grant in a considering way. 'You're quite sure, Mr Grant, that you don't want to write this book yourself? After all, it's quite a thing to do.'

'I shall never write a book,' Grant said firmly. 'Not even My Twenty Years at the Yard.'

'What! Not even your autobiography?'

'Not even my autobiography. It is my considered opinion that far too many books are written as it is.'

'But this is one that must be written,' Carradine said, looking slightly hurt.

'Of course it is. This one must be written. Tell me: there's something I forgot to ask you. How soon after that double pardon did Tyrrel get that appointment in France? How soon after his supposed service to Henry in July 1486 did he become Constable of the Castle of Guisnes?'

Carradine stopped looking hurt and looked as malicious as it was possible for his kind woolly-lamb face to look.

'I was wondering when you were going to ask that,' he said. 'I was going to throw it at you on my way out if you forgot to ask. The answer is: almost right away.'

'So. Another appropriate little pebble in the mosaic. I wonder whether the constableship just happened to be vacant, or whether it was a French appointment because Henry wanted him out of England.'

'I bet it was the other way about, and it was Tyrrel who wanted to get out of England. If I were being ruled by Henry VII, I'd sure prefer to be ruled by remote control. Especially if I had done a secret job for Henry that might make it convenient for Henry if I didn't live to too venerable an age.'

'Yes, perhaps you're right. He didn't only go abroad, he stayed abroad - as we have already observed. Interesting.'

'He wasn't the only one who stayed abroad. John Dighton did too. I couldn't find out who all the people who were supposed to be involved in the murder actually were. All the Tudor accounts are different, I suppose you know. Indeed most of them are so different that they contradict each other flat. Henry's pet historian, Polydore Virgil, says the deed was done when Richard was at York. According to the sainted More it was during an earlier trip altogether, when Richard was at Warwick. And the personnel changes with each account. So that it's difficult to sort them out. I don't know who Will Slater was – Black Will to you, and another piece of onomatopoeia – or Miles Forrest. But there was a John Dighton. Grafton says he lived for long at Calais "no less disdained than pointed at" and died there in great misery. How they relished a good moral, didn't they. The Victorians had nothing on them.'

'If Dighton was destitute it doesn't look as if he had done any job for Henry. What was he by trade?'

'Well, if it's the same John Dighton, he was a priest, and he was anything but destitute. He was living very comfortably on the proceeds of a sinecure. Henry gave a John Dighton the living of Fulbeck, near Grantham – that's in Lincolnshire – on the 2nd of May, 1487.'

'Well, well,' Grant said, drawling. '1487. And he, too, lives abroad and in comfort.'

'Uh-huh. Lovely, isn't it?'

'It's beautiful. And does anyone explain how the much-pointed-at Dighton wasn't hauled home by the scruff of his neck to hang for regicide?'

'Oh, no. Nothing like that. Tudor historians didn't any of them think from B to C.'

Grant laughed. 'I see you're being educated.'

'Sure. I'm not only learning history. I'm sitting at the feet of Scotland Yard on the subject of the human mind. Well, that will be about all for now. If you feel strong enough I'll read you the first two chapters of the book next time I come.' He paused and said: 'Would you mind, Mr Grant, if I dedicated it to you?'

'I think you had better dedicate it to Carradine The Third,' Grant said lightly.

But Carradine apparently did not feel it to be a light matter.

'I don't use soft soap as a dedication,' he said, with a hint of stiffness.

'Oh, not soft soap,' Grant said in haste. 'A matter of policy merely.'

'I'd never have started on this thing if it hadn't been for you, Mr Grant,' Carradine said, standing in the middle of the floor all formal and emotional and American and surrounded by the sweeping folds of his topcoat, 'and I should like to make due acknowledgement of my indebtedness.'

'I should be delighted, of course,' murmured Grant, and the royal figure in the middle of the floor relaxed to boyhood again and the awkward moment was over. Carradine went away joyous and light-footed as he had come, looking thirty pounds heavier and twelve inches more round the chest than he had done three weeks ago.

And Grant took out the new knowledge that had been given him, and hung it on the opposite wall, and stared at it.

She had been shut away from the world; that indestructibly virtuous beauty with the gilt hair.

Why gilt, he wondered for the first time. Silver-gilt probably; she had been radiantly fair. A pity that the word blonde had degenerated to the point where it had almost a secondary meaning.

She had been walled up to end her days where she could be no trouble to anyone. An eddy of trouble had moved with her all through her life. Her marriage to Edward had rocked England. She had been the passive means of Warwick's ruin. Her kindnesses to her family had built a whole new party in England and had prevented Richard's peaceful succession. Bosworth was implicit in that scanty little ceremony in the wilds of Northamptonshire when she became Edward's wife. But no one seemed to have borne her malice. Even the sinned-against Richard had forgiven her her relations' enormities. No one – until Henry came.

She had disappeared into obscurity. Elizabeth Woodville. The Queen Dowager who was mother of the Queen of England. The mother of the Princes in the Tower; who had lived free and prosperous under Richard III.

That was an ugly break in the pattern, wasn't it?

He took his mind away from personal histories and began to think police-fashion. It was time he tidied up his case. Put it shipshape for presenting. It would help the boy with his book, and better still it would clear his own mind. It would be down in black and white where he could see it.

He reached for his writing-pad and pen, and made a neat entry:

CASE: Disappearance of two boys (Edward, Prince of Wales; Richard, Duke of York) from the Tower of London, 1485 or the reabouts

He wondered whether it would be better to do the two suspects in parallel columns or successively. Perhaps it was better to finish with Richard first. So he made another neat headline; and began on his summing-up:

RICHARD III

Previous Record:

Good. Has excellent record in public service, and good reputation in private life. Salient characteristic as indicated by his actions: good sense.

In the matter of the presumed crime:

- (a) He did not stand to benefit; there were nine other heirs to the house of York, including three males.
- (b) There is no contemporary accusation.
- (c) The boys' mother continued on friendly terms with him until his death, and her daughters attended Palace festivities.
- (d) He showed no fear of the other heirs of York, providing generously for their upkeep and granting all of them their royal state.
- (e) His own right to the crown was unassailable, approved by Act of Parliament and public acclamation; the boys were out of the succession and of no danger to him.
- (f) If he had been nervous about disaffection then the person to have got rid of was not the two boys, but the person who really was next in succession to him: young Warwick. Whom he publicly created his heir when his own son died.

HENRY VII

Previous Record:

An adventurer, living at foreign courts. Son of an ambitious mother. Nothing known against his private life. No public office or employment. Salient characteristic as indicated by his actions: subtlety.

In the matter of the presumed crime:

- (a) It was of great importance to him that the boys should not continue to live. By repealing the Act acknowledging the children's illegitimacy, he made the elder boy King of England, and the younger boy the next heir.
- (b) In the Act which he brought before Parliament for the attainting of Richard he accused Richard of the conventional tyranny and cruelty but made no mention of the two young Princes. The conclusion is inevitable that at that time the two boys were alive and their whereabouts known.
 - (c) The boys' mother was deprived of her living and consigned to a nunnery eighteen months after his succession.
- (d) He took immediate steps to secure the persons of all the other heirs to the crown, and kept them in close arrest until he could with the minimum of scandal get rid of them.
 - (e) He had no right whatever to the throne. Since the death of Richard, young Warwick was de jure King of England.

It occurred to Grant for the first time, as he wrote it out, that it had been within Richard's power to legitimise his bastard son John, and foist him on the nation. There was no lack of precedent for such a course. After all, the whole Beaufort clan (including Henry's mother) were the descendants not only of an illegitimate union but of a double adultery. There was nothing to hinder Richard from legitimising that 'active and well-disposed' boy who lived in recognised state in his

household. It was surely the measure of Richard that no such course had apparently crossed his mind. He had appointed as his heir his brother's boy. Even in the destitution of his own grief, good sense was his ruling characteristic. Good sense and family feeling. No base-born son, however active and well-disposed, was going to sit in the Plantagenets' seat while his brother's son was there to occupy it.

It was remarkable how that atmosphere of family feeling permeated the whole story. All the way from Cicely's journeyings about in her husband's company, to her son's free acknowledgement of his brother George's boy as his heir.

And it occurred to him too for the first time in full force just how that family atmosphere strengthened the case for Richard's innocence. The boys whom he was supposed to have put down as he would put down twin foals were Edward's sons; children he must have known personally and well. To Henry, on the other hand, they were mere symbols. Obstacles on a path. He may never even have set eyes on them. All questions of character apart, the choice between the two men as suspects might almost be decided on that alone.

It was wonderfully clearing to the head to see it neat and tidy as (a), (b), and (c). He had not noticed before how doubly suspect was Henry's behaviour over Titulus Regius. If, as Henry had insisted, Richard's claim was absurd, then surely the obvious thing to do was to have the thing re-read in public and demonstrate its falsity. But he did no such thing. He went to endless pains to obliterate even the memory of it. The conclusion was inevitable that Richard's title to the crown as shown in Titulus Regius was unassailable.

On the afternoon when Carradine reappeared in the room at the hospital Grant had walked to the window and back again, and was so cock-a-hoop about it that The Midget was moved to remind him that it was a thing that a child of eighteen months could do. But nothing could subdue Grant today.

'Thought you'd have me here for months, didn't you,' he crowed.

'We are very glad to see you better so quickly,' she said primly; and added: 'We are, of course, very glad, too, to have your bed.'

And she clicked away down the corridor, all blonde curls and starch.

Grant lay on his bed and looked at his little prison room with something approaching benevolence. Neither a man who has stood at the Pole nor a man who has stood on Everest has anything on a man who has stood at a window after weeks of being merely twelve stones of destitution. Or so Grant felt.

Tomorrow he was going home. Going home to be cosseted by Mrs Tinker. He would have to spend half of each day in bed and he would be able to walk only with the aid of sticks, but he would be his own man again. At the bidding of no one. In tutelage to no half-pint piece of efficiency, yearned over by no lump of out-sized benevolence.

It was a glorious prospect.

He had already unloaded his hallelujahs all over Sergeant Williams, who had looked in on the completion of his chore in Essex, and he was now yearning for Marta to drop in so that he could peacock in front of her in his new-found manhood.

'How did you get on with the history books?' Williams had asked.

'Couldn't be better. I've proved them all wrong.'

Williams had grinned. 'I expect there's a law against that,' he said.' MI5 won't like it. Treason or *lèse-majesté* or something like that it might turn out to be. You never know nowadays. I'd be careful if I was you.'

I'll never again believe anything I read in a history book, as long as I live, so help me.'

'You'll have to make exceptions,' Williams pointed out with Williams' dogged reasonableness. 'Queen Victoria was true, and I suppose Julius Caesar did invade Britain. And there's 1066.'

'I'm beginning to have the gravest doubts about 1066. I see you've tied up the Essex job. What is Chummy like?'

'A thorough little blighter. Been treated soft all his life since he started stealing change from his Ma at the age of nine. A good belting at the age of twelve might have saved his life. Now he'll hang before the almond blossom's out. It's going to be an early spring. I've been working every evening in the garden this last few days, now that the days are drawing out. You'll be glad to sniff fresh air again.'

And he had gone away, rosy and sane and balanced, as befitted a man who was belted for his good in his youth.

So Grant was longing for some other visitor from the outside world that he was so soon to be a part of again, and he was delighted when the familiar tentative tap came on his door.

'Come in. Brent!' he called, joyfully,

And Brent came in.

But it was not the Brent who had last gone out.

Gone was the jubilation. Gone was his newly acquired breadth.

He was no longer Carradine the pioneer, the blazer of trails.

He was just a thin boy in a very long, very large overcoat. He looked young, and shocked, and bereaved.

Grant watched him in dismay as he crossed the room with his listless unco-ordinated walk. There was no bundle of paper sticking out of his mail-sack of a pocket today.

Oh, well, thought Grant philosophically; it had been fun while it lasted. There was bound to be a snag somewhere. One couldn't do serious research in that light-hearted amateur way and hope to prove anything by it. One wouldn't expect an amateur to walk into the Yard and solve a case that had defeated the pro's; so why should he have thought himself smarter than the historians. He had wanted to prove to himself that he was right in his face-reading of the portrait; he had wanted to blot out the shame of having put a criminal on the bench instead of in the dock. But he would have to accept his mistake, and like it. Perhaps he had asked for it. Perhaps, in his heart of hearts, he had been growing a little pleased with himself about his eye for faces.

'Hullo, Mr Grant,'

'Hullo, Brent.'

Actually it was worse for the boy. He was at the age when he expected miracles to happen. He was still at the age when he was surprised that a balloon should burst.

'You look saddish,' he said cheerfully to the boy. 'Something come unstuck.'

'Everything.

Carradine sat down on the chair and stared at the window.

'Don't these damned sparrows get you down?' he asked, fretfully.

'What is it? Have you discovered that there was a general rumour about the boys before Richard's death, after all?'

'Oh, much worse than that.'

'Oh. Something in print? A letter?'

'No, it isn't that sort of thing at all. It's something much worse. Something quite – quite fundamental. I don't know how to tell you.' He glowered at the quarrelling sparrows. 'These damned birds. I can never write that book now, Mr Grant.'

'Why not, Brent?'

'Because it isn't news to anyone. Everyone has known all about those things all along.'

'Known? About what?'

'About Richard not having killed the boys at all, and all that.'

'They've known? Since when!'

'Oh, hundreds and hundreds of years.'

'Pull yourself together, chum. It's only four hundred years altogether since the thing happened.'

'I know. But it doesn't make any difference. People have known about Richard's not doing it for hundreds and hundreds

'Will you stop that keening and talk sense. When did this - this rehabilitation first begin?'

'Begin? Oh, at the first available moment.'

'When was that?'

'As soon as the Tudors were gone and it was safe to talk.'

'In Stuart times, you mean?'

'Yes, I suppose – yes. A man Buck wrote a vindication in the seventeenth century. And Horace Walpole in the eighteenth. And someone called Markham in the nineteenth.'

'And who in the twentieth?'

'No one that I know of.'

'Then what's wrong with your doing it?'

'But it won't be the same, don't you see. It won't be a great discovery!' He said it in capitals. A Great Discovery.

Grant smiled at him. 'Oh, come! You can't expect to pick Great Discoveries off bushes. If you can't be a pioneer what's wrong with leading a crusade?'

'A crusade?'

'Certainly.'

'Against what?'

'Tonypandy.'

The boy's face lost its blankness. It looked suddenly amused, like someone who has just seen a joke.

'It's the damnedest silliest name, isn't it!' he remarked.

'If people have been pointing out for three hundred and fifty years that Richard didn't murder his nephews and a schoolbook can still say, in words of one syllable and without qualification, that he did, then it seems to me that Tonypandy has a long lead on you. It's time you got busy.'

'But what can I do when people like Walpole and those have failed?'

'There's that old saying about constant water and its effect on stone.'

'Mr Grant, right now I feel an awfully feeble little trickle.'

'You look it, I must say. I've never seen such self-pity. That's no mood to start bucking the British public in. You'll be giving enough weight away as it is.'

'Because I've not written a book before, you mean?'

'No, that doesn't matter at all. Most people's first books are their best anyway; it's the one they wanted most to write. No, I meant that all the people who've never read a history book since they left school will feel themselves qualified to pontificate about what you've written. They'll accuse you of whitewashing Richard; "whitewashing" has a derogatory sound that "rehabilitation" hasn't, so they'll call it whitewashing. A few will look up the Britannica, and feel themselves competent to go a little further in the matter. These will slay you instead of flaying you. And the serious historians won't even bother to notice you.'

'By God, I'll make them notice me!' Carradine said.

'Come! That sounds a little more like the spirit that won the Empire.'

'We haven't got an Empire,' Carradine reminded him.

'Oh, yes, you have,' Grant said equably. 'The only difference between ours and yours is that you acquired yours, economically, in the one latitude, while we got ours in bits all over the world. Had you written any of the book before the awful knowledge of its unoriginality hit you?'

'Yes, I'd done two chapters.'

'What have you done with them? You haven't thrown them away, have you?'

'No. I nearly did. I nearly threw them in the fire.'

'What stopped you?'

'It was an electric fire.' Carradine stretched out his long legs in a relaxing movement and began to laugh. 'Brother, I feel better already. I can't wait to land the British public one in the kisser with a few home truths. Carradine the First is just raging in my blood.'

'A very virulent fever, it sounds.'

'He was the most ruthless old blaggard that ever felled timber. He started as a logger and ended up with a Renaissance castle, two yachts, and a private car. Railroad car, you know. It had green silk curtains with bobbles on them and inlay woodwork that had to be seen to be believed. It has been popularly supposed, not least by Carradine the Third, that the Carradine blood was growing thin. But right now I'm all Carradine the First. I know just how the old boy felt when he wanted to buy a particular forest and someone said that he couldn't have it. Brother, I'm going to town.'

'That's nice,' Grant said, mildly. 'I was looking forward to that dedication.' He took his writing-pad from the table and held it out.'I've been doing a policeman's summing-up. Perhaps it may help you when you come to your peroration.'

Carradine took it and looked at it with respect.

'Tear it off and take it with you. I've finished with it.'

'I suppose in a week or two you'll be too busy with real investigations to care about a – an academic one,' Carradine said, a little wistfully.

'I'll never enjoy one more than I've enjoyed this,' Grant said, with truth. He glanced sideways at the portrait which was still propped against the books. 'I was more dashed than you would believe when you came in all despondent, and I thought it had come to pieces.' He looked back at the portrait and said: 'Marta thinks he is a little like Lorenzo the Magnificent. Her friend James thinks it is the face of a saint. My surgeon thinks it is the face of a cripple. Sergeant Williams thinks he looks like a great judge. But I think, perhaps, Matron comes nearest the heart of the matter.'

'What does she say?'

'She says it is a face full of the most dreadful suffering.'

'Yes. Yes, I suppose it is. And would you wonder, after all.'

'No. No, there was little he was spared. Those last two years of his life must have happened with the suddenness and weight of an avalanche. Everything had been going along so nicely. England on an even keel at last. The civil war fading out of mind, a good firm government to keep things peaceful and a good brisk trade to keep things prosperous. It must have seemed a good outlook, looking out from Middleham across Wensleydale. And in two short years – his wife, his son, and his peace.'

'I know one thing he was spared.'

'What?'

'The knowledge that his name was to be a hissing and a byword down the centuries.'

'Yes. That would have been the final heart-break. Do you know what I personally find the convincing thing in the case for Richard's innocence of any design for usurpation?'

'No. What?'

'The fact that he had to send for those troops from the North when Stillington broke his news. If he had had any fore-knowledge of what Stillington was going to say, or even any plans to concoct a story with Stillington's help, he would have brought those troops with him. If not to London then to the Home Counties where they would be handy. That he had to send urgently first to York and then to his Nevill cousins for men is proof that Stillington's confession took him entirely unawares.'

'Yes. He came up with his train of gentlemen, expecting to take over the Regency. He met the news of the Woodville trouble when he came to Northampton, but that didn't rattle him. He mopped up the Woodville two thousand and went on to London as if nothing had happened. There was still nothing but an orthodox Coronation in front of him as far as he knew. It wasn't until Stillington confessed to the council that he sends for troops of his own. And he has to send all the way to the North of England at a critical moment. Yes, you're right, of course. He was taken aback.' He propped the leg of his spectacles with a forefinger in the old tentative gesture, and proffered a companion piece. 'Know what I find the convincing thing in the case for Henry's guilt?'

'What?'

'The mystery.'

'Mystery?'

'The mysteriousness. The hush-hush. The hole-and-corner stuff.'

'Because it is in character, you mean?'

'No, no; nothing as subtle as that. Don't you see: Richard had no need of any mystery; but Henry's whole case depended on the boys' end being mysterious. No one has ever been able to think up a reason for such a hole-and-corner method as Richard was supposed to have used. It was a quite mad way to do it. He couldn't hope to get away with it. Sooner or later he was going to have to account for the boys not being there. As far as he knew he had a long reign in front of him. No one has ever been able to think why he should have chosen so difficult and dangerous a way when he had so many simpler methods at hand. He had only to have the boys suffocated, and let them lie in state while the whole of London walked by and wept over two young things dead before their time of fever. That is the way he *would* have done it, too. Goodness, *the whole point* of Richard's killing the boys was to prevent any rising in their favour, and to get any

benefit from the murder the fact of their deaths would have to be made public, and as soon as possible. It would defeat the whole plan if people didn't *know* that they were dead. But Henry, now. Henry *had* to find a way to push them out of sight. Henry *had* to be mysterious. Henry *had* to hide the facts of when and how they died. Henry's *whole case* depended on no one's knowing what exactly happened to the boys.'

'It did indeed, Brent; it did indeed,' Grant said, smiling at counsel's eager young face. 'You ought to be at the Yard, Mr Carradine!'

Brent laughed.

'I'll stick to Tonypandy,' he said. 'I bet there's a lot more of it that we don't know about. I bet history books are just riddled with it.'

'You'd better take Sir Cuthbert Oliphant with you, by the way.' Grant took the fat respectable-looking volume from his locker. 'Historians should be compelled to take a course in psychology before they are allowed to write.'

'Huh. That wouldn't do anything for them. A man who is interested in what makes people tick doesn't write history. He writes novels, or becomes an alienist, or a magistrate –'

'Or a confidence man.'

'Or a confidence man. Or a fortune-teller. A man who understands about people hasn't any yen to write history. History is toy soldiers.'

'Oh, come. Aren't you being a little severe? It's a very learned and erudite - '

'Oh, I didn't mean it that way. I mean: it's moving little figures about on a flat surface. It's half-way to mathematics, when you come to think about it.'

'Then if it's mathematics they've no right to drag in backstairs gossip,' Grant said, suddenly vicious. The memory of the sainted More continued to upset him. He thumbed through the fat respectable Sir Cuthbert in a farewell review. As he came to the final pages the progress of the paper from under his thumb slackened, and presently stopped.

'Odd,' he said, 'how willing they are to grant a man the quality of courage in battle. They have only tradition to go on, and yet not one of them questions it. Not one of them, in fact, fails to stress it.'

'It was an enemy's tribute,' Carradine reminded him. 'The tradition began with a ballad written by the other side.'

'Yes. By a man of the Stanleys. "Then a knight to King Richard gan say." It's here somewhere.' He turned over a leaf or two, until he found what he was looking for. 'It was "good Sir William Harrington", it seems. The knight in question.

"There may no man their strokes abide, the Stanleys dints they be so strong (the treacherous villains!)

Ye may come back at another tide, methinks ye tarry here too long,

Your horse at your hand is ready, another day you may worship win

And come to reign with royalty, and wear your crown and be our king."

"Nay, give me my battle-axe in my hand, set the crown of England on my head so high.

For by Him that made both sea and land, King of England this day I will die.

One foot I will never flee whilst the breath is my breast within."

As he said so did it be – if he lost his life he died a King.'

"Set the crown of England on my head";' said Carradine, musing. 'That was the crown that was found in a hawthorn bush afterwards.'

'Yes. Set aside for plunder probably.'

'I used to picture it one of those high plush things that King George got crowned in, but it seems it was just a gold circlet.'

'Yes. It could be worn outside the battle helmet.'

'Gosh,' said Carradine with sudden feeling, 'sure would have hated to wear that crown if I had been Henry! I sure would have hated it!' He was silent for a little, and then he said: 'Do you know what the town of York wrote – wrote in their records, you know – about the battle of Bosworth?'

'No.'

'They wrote: "This day was our good King Richard piteously slain and murdered; to the great heaviness of this city."

The chatter of the sparrows was loud in the quiet.

'Hardly the obituary of a hated usurper,' Grant said at last, very dry.

'No,' said Carradine, 'no. "To the great heaviness of this city";' he repeated slowly, rolling the phrase over in his mind. 'They cared so much about it that even with a new régime in the offing and the future not to be guessed at they put down in black and white in the town record their opinion that it was murder and their sorrow at it.'

'Perhaps they had just heard about the indignities perpetrated on the King's dead body and were feeling a little sick.'

'Yes. Yes. You don't like to think of a man you've known and admired flung stripped and dangling across a pony like a dead animal.'

'One wouldn't like to think of even an enemy so. But sensibility is not a quality that one would look for among the Henry-Morton crowd.'

'Huh. Morton!' said Brent, spitting out the word as if it were a bad taste. 'No one was "heavy" when Morton died, believe me. Know what the Chronicler wrote of him? The London one, I mean. He wrote: "In our time was no man like to be compared with him in all things; albeit that he lived not without the great disdain and hatred of the Commons of this land."

Grant turned to look at the portrait which had kept him company through so many days and nights.

'You know,' he said, 'for all his success and his Cardinal's hat I think Morton was the loser in that fight with Richard III. In spite of his defeat and his long traducing, Richard came off the better of these two. He was loved in his day.'

'That's no bad epitaph,' the boy said soberly.

'No. Not at all a bad epitaph,' Grant said, shutting Oliphant for the last time. 'Not many men would ask for a better.' He handed over the book to its owner. 'Few men have earned so much,' he said.

When Carradine had gone Grant began to sort out the things on his table, preparatory to his homegoing on the morrow. The unread fashionable novels could go to the hospital library to gladden other hearts than his. But he would keep the book with the mountain pictures. And he must remember to give The Amazon back her two history books. He looked them out so that he could give them to her when she brought in his supper. And he read again, for the first time since he began his search for the truth about Richard, the schoolbook tale of his villainy. There it was, in unequivocable black and white, the infamous story. Without a perhaps or a peradventure. Without a qualification or a question.

As he was about to shut the senior of the two educators his eye fell on the beginning of Henry VII's reign, and he read: 'It was the settled and considered policy of the Tudors to rid themselves of all rivals to the throne, more especially those heirs of York who remained alive on the succession of Henry VII. In this they were successful, although it was left to Henry VIII to get rid of the last of them.'

He stared at this bald announcement. This placid acceptance of wholesale murder. This simple acknowlegement of a process of family elimination.

Richard III had been credited with the elimination of two nephews, and his name was a synonym for evil. But Henry VII, whose 'settled and considered policy' was to eliminate a whole family was regarded as a shrewd and far-seeing monarch. Not very lovable perhaps, but constructive and painstaking, and very successful withal.

Grant gave up. History was something that he would never understand.

The values of historians differed so radically from any values with which he was acquainted that he could never hope to meet them on any common ground. He would go back to the Yard, where murderers were murderers and what went for Cox went equally for Box.

He put the two books tidily together and when The Amazon came in with his mince and stewed prunes he handed them over with a neat little speech of gratitude. He really was very grateful to The Amazon. If she had not kept her schoolbooks he might never have started on the road that led to his knowledge of Richard Plantagenet.

She looked confused by his kindness, and he wondered if he had been such a bear in his illness that she expected nothing but carping from him. It was a humiliating thought.

'We'll miss you, you know,' she said, and her big eyes looked as if they might brim with tears. 'We've grown used to having you here. We've even got used to *that*.' And she moved an elbow in the direction of the portrait.

A thought stirred in him.

'Will you do something for me?' he asked.

'Of course. Anything I can do.'

'Will you take that photograph to the window and look at it in a good light as long as it takes to count a pulse?'

'Yes, of course, if you want me to. But why?'

'Never mind why. You just do it to please me. I'll time you.'

She took up the portrait and moved into the light of the window.

He watched the second-hand of his watch.

He gave her forty-five seconds and then said: 'Well?' And as there was no immediate answer he said again: 'Well?'

'Funny,' she said. 'When you look at it for a little it's really quite a nice face, isn't it?'

THE CLASSIC MYSTERY WRITER

JOSEPHNE

The Singing Sands

It was six o'clock of a March morning, and still dark. The long train came sidling through the scattered lights of the yard, clicking gently over the points. Into the glow of the signal cabin and out again. Under the solitary emerald among the rubies on the signal bridge. On towards the empty grey waste of platform that waited under the arcs.

The London mail at the end of its journey.

Five hundred miles of track lay behind it in the darkness all the way to Euston and last night. Five hundred miles of moonlit fields and sleeping villages; of black towns and unsleeping furnaces; rain, fog, and frost; snow flurry and flood; tunnel and viaduct. Now, in the six o'clock bleakness of a March morning the hills had risen round it and it was coming, casual-seeming and quiet, to rest after its long urgency. And only one person in all its crowded length did not sigh with relief at the realisation.

Of those who sighed two at least sighed with a gladness that bordered on passion. One of these was a passenger, and the other was a railway employee. The passenger was Alan Grant; and the railway employee was Murdo Gallacher.

Murdo Gallacher was a sleeping-car attendant, and the best-hated living creature between Thurso and Torquay. For twenty years Murdo had browbeaten the travelling public into acquiescence and blackmailed them into tribute. Monetary tribute, that is. Their vocal tribute was voluntary. To first-class passengers far and wide he was known as Yughourt. (Oh God, it's Old Yughourt! they would say as his sour face became visible through the steamy gloom of Euston.) The third-class passengers called him a variety of things, both frank and descriptive. What his colleagues called him is nobody's business. Only three people had ever got the better of Murdo: a cowhand from Texas, a lance-corporal of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, and an unknown little Cockney woman in the third-class who had threatened to beat him over his bald head with a lemonade bottle. Neither rank nor achievement impressed Murdo: he hated one and resented the other; but he was greatly afraid of physical pain.

For twenty years Murdo Gallacher had done the absolute minimum. He had been bored by the job before he had been a week at it, but he had found it a rich lode and he had stayed to mine it. If you got morning tea from Murdo the tea would be weak, the biscuit soft, the sugar dirty, the tray slopped, and the spoon missing; but when Murdo came to collect the tray the protests which you had been rehearsing died on your lips. Now and then an Admiral of the Fleet or something like that would venture an opinion that it was damned awful tea, but the ruck smiled and paid up. For twenty years they had paid up, weary and browbeaten and blackmailed. And Murdo had collected. He was now the owner of a villa at Dunoon, a string of fried-fish shops in Glasgow, and a very nice bank balance. He might have retired years ago but he could not bear the thought of losing his full pension; so he endured the boredom a little longer and evened things up by not bothering with early morning teas unless passengers suggested the thing themselves; and sometimes, if he was very sleepy, forgetting about the order anyway. He hailed the end of each journey with the relief of a man who is working out his sentence and has only a short time left.

Alan Grant, watching the lights of the yard float past beyond the steamed-up window and listening to that gentle sound of the wheels clicking over the points, was glad because the end of the journey was the end of a night's suffering. Grant had spent the night trying not to open the door into the corridor. Wide awake, he had lain on his expensive pallet and sweated by the hour. He had sweated not because the compartment was too hot—the air-conditioning worked to a marvel—but because (O Misery! O Shame! O Mortification!) the compartment represented A Small Enclosed Space. To the normal eye the compartment was just a neat little room with a bunk, a wash-basin, a mirror, luggage racks in assorted sizes, shelves that appeared or disappeared as bidden, a fine little drawer for one's hypothetical valuables, and a hook for one's presumably unhocked watch. But to the initiate, the sad and haunted initiate, it was A Small Enclosed Space.

Overwork, the doctor called it.

'Sit back and browse for a little,' the doctor had said, crossing one elegant Wimpole Street leg over the other and admiring the hang of it.

Grant could not imagine himself sitting back, and he considered browsing a loathsome word and a contemptible occupation. Browsing. A fattening-up for the table. A mindless satisfaction of animal desires. Browse, indeed! The very sound of the word was an offence. A snore.

'Have you any hobbies?' the doctor had asked, his admiring glance going on to his shoes.

'No,' Grant had said shortly.

'What do you do when you go on holiday?'

'I fish.'

'You fish?' said the psychologist, seduced from his Narcissian gazing. 'And you don't consider that a hobby?'

'Certainly not.'

'What is it, then, would you say?'

'Something between a sport and a religion.'

And at that Wimpole Street had smiled and had looked quite human; and assured him that his cure was only a matter of time. Time and relaxation.

Well, at least he had managed not to open that door last night. But the triumph had been dearly bought. He was drained and empty; a walking nothingness. 'Don't fight it,' the doctor had said. 'If you want to be in the open, go into the open.' But to have opened that door last night would have meant a defeat so mortal that he felt there would be no recovery. It would have been an unconditional surrender to the forces of Unreason. So he had lain and sweated. And the door had stayed closed.

But now, in the unrewarding dark of early morning, in the bleak anonymous dark, he was as without virtue as if he had lost. 'I suppose this is how women feel after long labour,' he thought, with that fundamental detachment which Wimpole Street had noted and

approved. 'But at least they have a brat to show for it. What have I got?'

His pride, he supposed. Pride that he had not opened a door that there was no reason to open. Oh God!

He opened the door now. Reluctantly; and appreciating the irony of that reluctance. Loath to face the morning and life. Wishing that he could throw himself back on that rumpled couch and sleep and sleep.

He picked up the two suitcases which Yughourt had not offered to do anything about, tucked the bundle of unread periodicals under his arm, and went out into the corridor. The little vestibule at the end of it was blocked almost to the roof with the luggage of the more lavish tippers, so that the door was nearly invisible; and Grant moved on into the second of the first-class coaches. The forward end of that too was stacked waist-deep with privileged obstacles, and he began to walk down the corridor towards the door at the rear end. As he did so Yughourt himself came from his cubby-hole at the far end to make sure that Number B Seven was aware that they were nearly at the terminus. It was the acknowledged right of Number B Seven, or of any Number whatever, to leave the train at his leisure after arrival; but Yughourt had of course no intention of hanging round while someone had his sleep out. So he knocked loudly on the door of B Seven and went in.

As Grant came level with the open door Yughourt was shaking B Seven, who was lying fully dressed on the bunk, by the cloth of his sleeve and saying in choked exasperation: 'Come on, sir, come on! We're practically in.'

He looked up as Grant's shadow darkened the door and said disgustedly: 'Tight as an owl!'

The compartment was so solid with the reek of whisky that you could stand a walking-stick in it, Grant noticed. Automatically he picked up the newspaper that Yughourt's shaking had dislodged on to the compartment floor, and straightened the man's jacket.

'Can't you recognise a dead man when you see one?' he said. Through the haze of his tiredness he heard his own voice say it: Can't you recognise a dead man when you see one? As if it were a thing of no moment. Can't you recognise a primrose when you see one? Can't you recognise a Rubens when you see one? Can't you recognise the Albert Memorial when—

'Dead!' said Yughourt in a kind of howl. 'He can't be! I'm due to go off.'

That, Grant noted from his far-away stance, was all that it meant to Mr Blast His Soul Gallacher. Someone had taken leave of life, had gone out from warmth and feeling and perception to nothingness, and all it meant to Damn His Eyes Gallacher was that he would be late in getting off duty.

'What'll I do?' said Yughourt. 'How was I to know anyone was drinking themselves to death in my coach! What'll I do?'

'Report to the police, of course,' Grant said, and for the first time was conscious of life again as a place where one might have pleasure. It gave him a twisted macabre pleasure that Yughourt had at last met his match: the man who would get out of tipping him; and that that man should be the one to put him to more inconvenience than anyone had succeeded in doing in all his twenty years in the railway service.

He looked again at the young face under the rumpled dark hair, and went away down the corridor. Dead men were not his responsibility. He had had his fill of dead men in his time, and although he had never quite lost a heart-contraction at its irrevocability, death had no longer power to shock him.

The wheels ceased their clicking and instead came the long low hollow sound that a train makes coming into a railway station. Grant lowered the window and watched the grey ribbon of the platform run past. The cold struck him like a blow in the face and he began to shiver uncontrollably.

He dropped the two suitcases on the platform and stood there (chattering like a blasted monkey, he thought resentfully) and wished that it were possible to die temporarily. In some last dim recess of his mind he knew that to dither with cold and nerves on a station platform at six of a winter morning was in the final resort a privilege; a corollary to being alive; but oh, how wonderful it would be to achieve temporary death and pick up life again at some happier moment.

'To the hotel, sir?' the porter said. 'Yes, I'll take them over when I've seen to this barrow-load.'

He stumbled up the steps and across the bridge. The wood sounded drumlike and hollow under his tread, great bursts of steam billowed up round him from below, noises clanged and echoed from the dark vault about him. They were all wrong about hell, he thought. Hell wasn't a nice cosy place where you fried. Hell was a great cold echoing cave where there was neither past nor future; a black, echoing desolation. Hell was concentrated essence of a winter morning after a sleepless night of self-distaste.

He stepped out into the empty courtyard, and the sudden quiet soothed him. The darkness was cold but clean. A hint of greyness in its quality spoke of morning, and a breath of snow in its cleanness spoke of the 'high tops'. Presently, when it was daylight, Tommy would come to the hotel and pick him up and they would drive away into the great clean Highland country; away into the wide, unchanging, undemanding Highland world where people died only in their beds and no one bothered to shut a door anyhow because it was too much trouble.

In the hotel dining-room the lights were on only at one end, and into the gloom of the unlit spaces marched ranks of naked baize-topped tables. He had never before, now he came to think of it, seen restaurant tables undressed. They were really very humble shabby things stripped of their white armour. Like waiters without their shirt-fronts.

A child in a black uniform dress and a green jersey coat embroidered with flowers poked her head round a screen and seemed startled to see him. He asked what he might have for breakfast. She took a cruet from the sideboard and set it on the cloth in front of him with an air of ringing the curtain up.

'I'll send Mary to you,' she said kindly, and went away behind the screen.

Service, he thought, had lost its starch and its high glaze. It had become what housewives call rough-dried. But now and then a promise to send Mary to one made up for embroidered jerseys and similar infelicities.

Mary was a plump calm creature who would inevitably have been a Nannie if Nannie's were not out of fashion, and under her ministrations Grant felt himself relaxing as a child does in the presence of a benevolent authority. It was a fine state of affairs, he thought bitterly, when he needed reassurance so badly that a fat hotel waitress could provide it.

But he ate what she put in front of him and began to feel better. Presently she came back, removed the slices of cut bread, and put in their place a plate of morning rolls.

'Here's the baps to you,' she said. 'They've just this minute come. They're poor things nowadays. No chew in them at all. But

they're better than that bread.'

She pushed the marmalade nearer to his hand, looked to see if he needed more milk, and went away again. Grant, who had had no intention of eating any more, buttered a bap and reached for one of the unread papers from last night's store. What came to his hand was a London evening paper, and he looked at it with a puzzled lack of recognition. Had he bought an evening paper? Surely he had read the evening paper at the normal hour of four o'clock in the afternoon. Why buy another at seven o'clock in the evening? Had buying an evening paper become a reflex action; as automatic as brushing one's teeth? Lighted bookstall: evening paper. Was that the way it worked?

The paper was a *Signal*; the afternoon voice of the morning *Clarion*. Grant looked again at the headlines which he had absorbed yesterday afternoon and thought how constant in kind they were. It was yesterday's paper, but it might equally be last year's or next month's. The headlines would for ever be the ones that he was looking at now: the Cabinet row, the dead body of the blonde in Maida Vale, the Customs prosecution, the hold-up, the arrival of an American actor, the street accident. He pushed the thing away from him, but as he reached out a hand for the next in the pile he noticed that the blank space for the Stop Press news bore scribblings in pencil. He turned the paper round so that he could see what someone had been calculating. But it seemed that the scribble was not after all some newsboy's hasty reckoning of the odds. It was someone's attempt at verse. That it was an original work and not an attempt to remember some verse already known was apparent in the desultory writing and in the fact that the writer had filled the two missing lines by ticking in the required number of feet; a trick that Grant himself had used in the days when he had been the best sonnet-writer in the sixth form.

But this time the poem was none of his.

And suddenly he knew where the paper had come from. He had acquired it by an action much more automatic than buying an evening paper. He had put it under his arm with the others when he picked it up as it slipped to the floor of compartment B Seven. His conscious mind—or as much of it as was conscious after last night—was concerned with the disarray that Yughourt was making of a helpless man. His only deliberate action had been his reproof to Yughourt in his straightening of the man's jacket, and for that he had needed a hand, and so the paper had gone under his arm with the rest.

So the young man with the tumbled black hair and the reckless eyebrows had been a poet, had he?

Grant looked with interest at the pencilled words. The writer had designed his effort in eight lines, it seemed, but had not been able to think of the fifth and sixth. So that the scribble read:

The beasts that talk, The streams that stand, The stones that walk, The singing sand,

. .

That guard the way To Paradise.

Well, it was odd enough, in all conscience. The beginnings of delirium tremens?

It was understandable that the owner of that very individual face would see nothing so ordinary in his alcoholic dreams as pink rats. Nature itself would turn cartwheels for the young man with the reckless eyebrows. What was the Paradise that was guarded by so terrifying a strangeness? Oblivion? Why had he needed oblivion so badly that it represented Paradise to him? That he had been prepared to run the known horror of the approaches to it?

Grant ate the fine fresh bap that there was 'no chew in' and considered the matter. The writing was unformed but not at all shaky; it looked the writing of an adult who wrote an unformed hand not because his co-ordination was bad but because he had never quite grown up. Because in essentials he was still the schoolboy who had originally written that way. This theory was confirmed by the shape of the capital letters, which were made in pure copy-book form. Odd, that so individual a creature had had no desire to impress his individuality on the form of his letters. Very few people indeed did not adapt the copy-book form to their own liking; to their own unconscious need.

One of Grant's milder interests had for years been this business of handwriting; and in his work he had found the results of his long observation greatly useful. Now and then, of course, he was shaken out of any complacency about his deductions—a multiple murderer who dissolved his victims in acid turned out to have handwriting remarkable only for its extreme logic; which after all was perhaps appropriate enough—but in general, handwriting provided a very good index to a man. And in general a man who continued to use the schoolboy form for his letters did so for one of two reasons: either he was unintelligent, or he wrote so little that the writing had had no chance of absorbing his personality.

Considering the high degree of intelligence that had put into words that nightmare hazard at the gates of Paradise, it was obvious that it was not lack of personality that had kept the young man's writing adolescent. His personality—his vitality and interest—had gone into something else.

Into what? Something active, something extrovert. Something in which writing was used for messages like: 'Meet me Cumberland bar, 6.45, Tony', or for filling up a log.

But he was introvert enough to have analysed and put into words that country-of-the-moon on the way to his Paradise. Introvert enough to have stood apart and looked at it; to have wanted to record it.

Grant sat in a pleasant warm daze, chewing and considering. He noted the tightly-joined tops of the n's and m's. A liar? Or just secretive? A curiously cautious trait to appear in the writing of a man with those eyebrows. It was a strange thing how much the meaning of a countenance depended on eyebrows. One change of degree in the angle this way or that and the whole effect was different. Film magnates took nice little girls from Balham and Muswell Hill and rubbed out their eyebrows and painted in other ones and they became straightway mysterious creatures from Omsk and Tomsk. He had once been told by Trabb, the cartoonist, that it was his eyebrows that had lost Ernie Price his chance of being Prime Minister. 'They didn't like his eyebrows,' Trabb had said, blinking

owlishly over his beer. 'Why? Don't ask me. I just draw. Because they looked bad-tempered, perhaps. They don't like a bad-tempered man. Don't trust him. But that's what lost him his chance, take it from me. His eyebrows. They didn't like 'em.' Bad-tempered eyebrows, supercilious eyebrows, calm eyebrows, worried eyebrows—it was the eyebrows that gave a face its keynote. And it was the slant of the black eyebrows that had given that thin white face on the pillow its reckless look even in death.

Well, the man had been sober when he wrote those words, that at least was clear. That toper's oblivion in compartment B Seven—the fugged air, the rucked blankets, the empty bottle rolling about on the floor, the overturned glass on the shelf—may have been the Paradise he sought, but he was sober when he blue-printed the way to it.

The singing sand.

Uncanny but somehow attractive.

Singing sand. Surely there actually were singing sands somewhere? It had a vaguely familiar sound. Singing sands. They cried out under your feet as you walked. Or the wind did it, or something. A man's forearm in a checked tweed sleeve reached in front of him and took a bap from the plate.

'You seem to be doing yourself very well,' Tommy said, pulling out a chair and sitting down. He split the bap and buttered it. 'There's no chew in these things at all nowadays. When I was a boy you sank your teeth in them and pulled. It was evens which came away first: your teeth or the bit of bap. But if your teeth won you really had something worth having. A nice floury, yeasty mouthful that would last you for a couple of minutes. They don't taste of anything nowadays, and you could fold them in two and put the whole thing in your mouth without any danger of choking yourself.'

Grant looked at him in silence and with affection. There was no intimacy so close, he thought, as the intimacy that bound you to a man with whom you'd shared a Prep. school dorm. They had shared their public school days too, but it was Prep. school that he remembered each time he encountered Tommy anew. Perhaps because in all essentials that fresh pinky-brown face with the round ingenuous blue eyes was the same face that used to appear above a crookedly-buttoned maroon blazer. Tommy had always buttoned his blazer with a fine insouciance.

It was so like Tommy not to waste time or vitality on conventional inquiries as to his journey and his health. Neither would Laura, of course. They would accept him as he stood; as if he had been there for some time. As if he had never gone away at all but was still on his previous visit. It was an extraordinarily restful atmosphere to sink back into.

'How is Laura?'

'Never better. Putting on a bit of weight. At least that's what she says. Don't see it myself. I never liked skinny women.'

There had been a time, when they were both about twenty, when Grant had thought of marrying his cousin Laura; and she, he had been sure, had had thoughts of marrying him. But before any word had been said the magic had faded and they were back on the old friendly footing. The magic had been part of the long intoxication of a Highland summer. Part of hill mornings smelling of pine needles, and of endless twilights sweet with the scent of clover. For Grant his cousin Laura had always been part of the happiness of summer holidays; they had graduated together from burn-paddling to their first fishing-rods, and together they had first walked the Larig and together had stood for the first time on the top of Braeriach. But it was not until that summer at the end of their adolescence that the happiness had crystallised into Laura herself; that the whole of summer was focused into the person of Laura Grant. He still had a slight lifting of the heart when he thought of that summer. It had the light perfection, the iridescence, of a bubble. And because no word had been said the bubble would never now be broken. It stayed light and perfect and iridescent and poised, where they had left it. They had both gone on to other things; to other people. Laura indeed had skipped from one person to the next one with the bright indifference of a child playing hop-scotch. And then he had taken her to that Old Boys' dance. And she had met Tommy Rankin. And that had been that.

'What's the fuss at the station?' Tommy asked. 'Ambulances and things.'

'A man died on the train. I expect it is that.'

'Oh,' said Tommy, dismissing it. 'Not your funeral this time,' he added in a congratulatory way.

'No. Not my funeral, thank Heaven.'

'They'll miss you on the Embankment.'

'I doubt it.'

'Mary,' said Tommy, 'I could do with a pot of good strong tea.' He flicked the plate that held the baps with a contemptuous forefinger. 'And another couple of these poor bargains.' He turned his serious childlike gaze on Grant and said: 'They'll have to miss you. They'll be one short, won't they?'

Grant expelled his breath in the nearest he had come to a laugh for months. Tommy had been commiserating with Headquarters, not on the loss of his genius, but on the lack of his presence. His 'family' attitude had been almost identical with the professional reaction of his Chief. 'Sick leave!' Bryce had said, his little elephant eyes running over Grant's healthy-looking frame and coming back to his face with disgust. 'Well, well! What is the Force coming to! In my young days you stayed on duty until you fell over. And you went on writing up your notes until the ambulance carted you away off the floor.' It had not been easy to tell Bryce what the doctor had said, and Bryce had not made it any easier. Bryce had never had a nerve of any sort in his body; he was mere physical force animated by a shrewd if limited brain. There had been neither comprehension nor sympathy in his reception of Grant's news. Indeed, there had been a subtle suggestion, a mere whiff of an implication, that Grant was malingering. That this so-strange breakdown that left him so markedly well and fit in appearance had something to do with the spring run in Highland rivers; that he had already arranged his fishing flies before going to Wimpole Street.

'What will they do to fill the gap?' Tommy asked.

'Promote Sergeant Williams, probably. His promotion is long overdue anyhow.'

It had been no easier to tell the faithful Williams. When your subordinate has openly hero-worshipped you for years it is not pleasant to have to appear before him as a poor nerve-ridden creature at the mercy of non-existent demons. Williams, too, had never had a nerve in his body. He took everything as it came, placid and unquestioning. It had not been easy to tell Williams and see the admiration change to concern. To—pity? 'Push over the marmalade,' Tommy said.

The peace induced by Tommy's matter-of-fact acceptance of him deepened as they drove into the hills. These two accepted him; standing around in a detached benevolence, watching him come in a familiar quiet. It was a grey morning, and still. The landscape was tidy and bare. Tidy grey walls round bare fields, bare fences along the tidy ditches. Nothing had begun to grow yet in this waiting countryside. Only a willow here and there by a culvert side showed live and green in the half-shades.

It was going to be all right. This is what he had needed; this wide silence, this space, this serenity. He had forgotten how benevolent the place was; how satisfying. The near hills were round and green and kind; beyond them were farther ones, stained blue by the distance. And behind all stood the long rampart of the Highland line, white and remote against the calm sky.

'The river is very low, isn't it?' he said, as they came down into the valley of the Turlie. And was invaded by panic.

That was the way it always happened. One moment a sane, free, self-possessed human being, and the next a helpless creature in the grip of unreason. He pressed his hands together to keep himself from flinging the door open and tried to listen to what Tommy was saying. No rain for weeks. They had had no rain for weeks. Let him think about the lack of rain. It was important, the lack of rain. It spoiled the fishing. It was to fish he had come to Clune. If they didn't have rain there would be no run of fish. No water for them. Oh God, help me not to make Tommy stop! No water. Think intelligently about fishing. If they had had no rain for weeks then rain must be due, mustn't it? Why could you ask a friend to stop the car and let you be sick and yet not ask him to stop the car so that you could get out of its small shut-in-ness? Look at the river. *Look* at it. Remember things about it. That was where you caught your best fish last year. That was where Pat slipped down when he was sitting on the rock and was left hanging by the seat of his pants.

'As nice a clean-run fish as ever you saw,' Tommy was saying.

The hazels by the river made a bright mauve smudge in the grey-green of the moor. Presently, when it was summer-time, the cold clattering of their leaves would make an obbligato to the river's song, but just now they stood in a pink silent huddle along the bank.

Tommy, looking at the state of the water, also noticed the bare hazel twigs, but being a parent he was not moved to think of summer afternoons. 'Pat has discovered that he is a diviner,' he said.

That was better. Think about Pat. Talk about Pat.

'The house is strewn with twigs of all shapes and sizes.'

'Has he discovered anything?' If he could keep his mind on Pat it might be all right.

'He has discovered gold under the sitting-room hearth, a body under the whatyoumaycallem in the downstairs bathroom, and two wells.'

'Where are the wells?' It couldn't be so very long now. Five miles to the head of the glen and Clune.

'One under the dining-room floor and one under the kitchen passage.'

'I take it that you haven't dug up the sitting-room hearth.' The window was wide open. What was there to worry about? It wasn't really a closed space, not a closed space at all.

'We have not. He is very peeved about that. Said I was a once-born.'

'Once-born?'

'Yes. It's his latest word. It ranks just one degree below a stinker, I understand.'

'Where did he get the word?' He would hang on till they got to that birch wood at the corner. Then he would ask Tommy to stop.

'Don't know. From some Theosophist woman who talked to the W.R.I, last autumn, I should think.'

Why should he mind Tommy's knowing? There was nothing shameful about it. If he were a paralysed syphilitic he would accept Tommy's help and sympathy. Why should he want to keep from Tommy's knowledge the fact that he was sweating with terror because of something that didn't exist? Perhaps he could cheat? Perhaps he could just ask Tommy to stop for a little while he admired the view?

Here was the birch wood. At least he had lasted that far.

He would make it the bit of road level with the bend of the river. He would make the excuse of having a look at the water. Much more plausible than looking at the view. Tommy would look with alacrity at a river and only with passive protest at a view.

About fifty seconds more. One, two, three, four....

Now.

'We lost two sheep in that pool this winter,' Tommy said, sweeping past the bend.

Too late.

What other excuse could he make? He was too near Clune now for excuses to be easy to find.

He could not even light a cigarette in case his hands were shaking too much.

Perhaps if he did something, however trivial....

He took the bundle of papers from the seat by his side, rearranging them, shuffling them busily and without point. He noticed that the *Signal* was not among them. He had meant to take it with him because of the odd little tentative verse in the Stop Press, but he must have left it in the hotel dining-room. Oh, well. It didn't matter. It had served its turn in giving interest to his breakfast. And the owner certainly would not want it again. He had achieved his Paradise, his oblivion; if that is what he had wanted. Not for him the privilege of uncontrolled hands and sweating skin. The privilege of wrestling with demons. Not for him the clean morning, the kind earth, the loveliness of the Highland line against the sky.

For the first time it occurred to him to wonder what had brought the young man to the North.

He had not, presumably, engaged a first-class sleeping compartment just to drink himself insensible in. He had had an intended

destination. He had had business and desire. A purpose.

Why had he come to the North at this bleak unfashionable season? To fish? To climb? The compartment as he remembered it had given an impression of bareness, but the heavy luggage might have been under the bunk. Or, indeed, in the van. Apart from sport what was there?

Official business?

Not with that face; no.

An actor? An artist? Just possibly.

A sailor going to join his ship? Going to some naval base beyond Inverness? That was possible. The face would look very well on the bridge of a ship. A small ship; very fast; and hellish in any kind of a sea.

What else was there? What would bring a dark, thin young man with reckless eyebrows and a passion for alcohol to the Highlands at the beginning of March? Unless in these days of whisky shortage he had had thoughts of starting an illicit still?

It was a pleasant idea, at that. How easy would it be? Not as easy as in Ireland, because the will to lawlessness was lacking; but once you had achieved it the whisky would be a great deal better. He almost wished that he could have put the idea to the young man. Could have sat opposite him at dinner last night, perhaps, and watched the gleam come into his eye at the thought of such delicious flouting of the Law. He wished that he could have talked to him anyway; exchanged ideas with him; found out about him. If someone had talked with him last night he might now be part of this living morning, of this fine gracious world with its gifts and its promise, instead of—

'And gaffed him in the pool below the footbridge,' said Tommy, finishing a story.

Grant looked down at his hands, and found that they were still.

The dead young man, who could not save himself, had saved him.

He looked up and saw in front of him the white house of Clune. It lay in the green cup of the hill, alone except for its attendant slab of sheltering fir-wood stuck like some dark green wool-work on the bare landscape. A blue curl of smoke rose up from the chimney into the still air. It was the fine essence of peace.

As they drove up the sandy track from the road he saw Laura come out of the door and stand waiting for them. She waved to them, and as her arm came down from its wave she tucked in the strand of hair that fell on to her forehead. The familiar gesture warmed his chilled being. Just so she used to be waiting on the little Badenoch platform for him when she was a child; with just that wave and that tucking-in of a strand of hair. The same strand of hair.

'Damn,' said Tommy, 'I forgot to post her letters. Don't mention it unless she asks.'

Laura kissed him on both cheeks, took one look at him, and said:

'I have a lovely bird for your lunch, but you look as if a good long sleep would do you more good. So go straight up and have it and forget about food until you waken. We have weeks to gossip in, so we don't have to start right now.'

Only Laura, he thought, would have streamlined her hostess rôle to a guest's need so neatly. No subtle touting of the beautifully planned luncheon; no concealed blackmail. She did not even ply one with unwanted cups of tea, nor pointedly recommend her fine hot bath-water. She did not even demand the small-chat of arrival, the polite hanging around. She supplied without question and without hesitation the thing that he needed. A pillow.

He wondered whether it was that he looked a wreck or whether it was just that Laura knew him so well. It occurred to him that he would not mind Laura's knowing about his bondage of fear. It was odd that where he had shrunk from exhibiting his weakness to Tommy he should not care that Laura might learn about it. It should have been the other way about.

'I have put you in the other bedroom this time,' she said preceding him up the stairs, 'because the west one has been done up and it still stinks a bit.'

She was in truth putting on weight a little, he noticed; but her ankles were as good as ever. And then, with that native detachment that never quite deserted him, he realised that his lack of any desire to conceal from Laura his childish fits of panic was proof that no small remote part of him was still in love with her. The need of the male to look well in the eyes of the beloved one was no part of his relation with Laura.

'People always say about east bedrooms that they get the morning sun,' she said, standing in the middle of the east bedroom and looking at it as if she had never seen it before. 'As if it were a recommendation. I think myself it's much nicer to be able to look out on a sunny landscape. Which you can't do with the sun in your eyes.' She stuck her thumbs in her waistband and eased the belt that was growing too tight. 'But the west room will be habitable in a day or two, so you can change over then if you want to. How is my dear Sergeant Williams?'

'Pink and clean.'

He had an instant picture of Williams, sitting solid and shy at the tea-table in the lounge of the Westmorland. He had been on his way out after a session with the manager and had come across Laura and Grant having tea, and had been persuaded to join them. He had made a great success with Laura.

'You know, whenever this country is in one of its periodic messes, I think of Sergeant Williams and am quite sure on the instant that everything is going to be all right.'

'I suppose *I* don't reassure you at all,' Grant said, busy unstrapping luggage.

'Not noticeably. Not that way, anyway. You'd only be a comfort if everything wasn't going to be all right.' With which cryptic statement she left him. 'Don't come down until you want to. Don't come down at all, if it comes to that. Just ring when you waken.'

Her footsteps went away down the passage, and the silence flooded in behind her.

He stripped off his clothes and without bothering to pull a curtain over the light he fell into bed. Presently he thought: I'd better draw those curtains or the light may waken me too soon. He opened his eyes reluctantly, to gauge the degree of light, and found that the light was no longer coming in at the window at all. It was lying on the out-of-doors instead. He lifted his head from the pillow to consider this oddity, and realised that it was late afternoon.

Relaxed and amused, he turned on to his back and lay listening to the quiet. The immemorial quiet. He savoured it, and luxuriated in his long reprieve. Not an enclosed space between this and the Pentland Firth. Between this and the North Pole, if it came to that. Through the wide-open window he could see the evening sky, still grey but faintly luminous and streaked with level cloud. No rain in that sky; only an echo of the peace that held the world in this contented quiet. Oh, well, if he could not fish he could walk. If the worst came to the worst he could shoot rabbits.

He watched the level clouds darken against their background and wondered whom Laura would have got for him to marry this time. It was an extraordinary thing how all married women were banded together against the state of singleness in man. If the women were happily married, like Laura, they considered marriage the only satisfactory state for an adult not suffering from any marked incapacity or relevant hindrance. If they were unhappily yoked, then they were filled with resentment of anyone who had escaped such punishment. Each time that he came to Clune, Laura was in the habit of producing some carefully vetted female for his consideration. Nothing was ever said about their desirable qualities, of course; they were just trotted up and down in front of him so that he might view their paces. Nor, when he showed no particular interest in a candidate, was there any overt regret in the atmosphere; any suggestion of reproof. All that happened was that next time Laura had a new idea.

Somewhere, far away, was a sound that was either the lazy clucking of a hen or the clash of teacups being assembled. He listened for a little, hoping that it was a hen, but decided with regret that it was tea in preparation. He must get up. Pat would be home from school, and Bridget awake from her afternoon nap. It was quite typically Laura that she should not even have demanded from him a due admiration of her daughter; that he had not been asked to exclaim over her growth in the last year, her intelligence, her looks. Bridget had not been mentioned at all. She was merely a young creature somewhere out of sight, like the rest of the farm animals.

He got up and went to have a bath. And twenty minutes later he went downstairs conscious that he was hungry for the first time for months.

The family picture upon which the sitting-room door opened was pure Zoffany, he thought. The sitting-room at Clune occupied almost the whole of what had been the original farmhouse and was now a small wing to the main building. Because it had once been several rooms instead of one it had more windows than are usual in its kind; because it had thick walls it was warm and safe-feeling; and because it had a south-west outlook it was brighter than most. So all the traffic of the house was concentrated there, as in the hall of some medieval manor. Only at luncheon and supper was any other room used by the family. A large round table by the fire ensured the comforts of 'dining-room' meals at tea and breakfast, and the rest of the room was a fine free mixture of office, drawing-room, music-room, schoolroom and greenhouse. Johan, Grant thought, would not have had to alter one detail. It was all there already, even to the cadging terrier at the table and Bridget splay-legged on the hearthrug.

Bridget was a blonde, silent child of three who spent her days endlessly rearranging the same few objects into new patterns. 'I can't make up my mind whether she is mentally deficient or a genius,' Laura said. But Grant thought that the two-second glance with which Bridget favoured him on introduction entirely justified the cheerfulness of Laura's tone; there was nothing wrong with the intelligence of The Child, as Patrick called her. This epithet as used by Pat had no sense of opprobrium; nor even any marked condescension; it merely emphasised his own inclusion in the adult group, to which his six years seniority in his own estimation entitled him.

Pat had red hair, and a bleak and intimidating grey eye. He was wearing a tattered green tartan kilt, smoke-blue stockings, and a much-darned grey jersey. His greeting to Grant was off-hand but reassuringly uncouth. Pat spoke from choice what his mother called 'clotted Perthshire', his bosom friend at the village school being the shepherd's son, who hailed from Killin. He could, of course, when he had a mind, speak faultless English, but it was always a bad sign. When Pat was 'not speaking' to you he was always not speaking in the best English.

Over tea, Grant asked him if he had yet made up his mind what he was going to be; Pat's invariable answer to the question from the age of four having been: 'A'm taking it into avizandum.' A phrase borrowed from his J.P. father.

- 'Ay,' said Pat, spreading jam with a liberal hand. 'A've made up muh mind.'
- 'You have? That's fine. What are you going to be?'
- 'A revolutionary.'
- 'I hope I never have to arrest you.'
- 'Yu couldna,' said Pat simply.
- 'Why not?'
- 'A'll be good, man,' said Pat, dipping the spoon again.
- 'I'm sure that's the sense Queen Victoria used the word in,' Laura said, removing the jam from her son's possession.
- It was for that sort of thing that he had loved her. The odd glinting detachment that shot the texture of her maternalism.
- 'I have a fish for you,' Pat said, scraping the jam to one side of the slice of bread, so that it would, over at least half the surface, achieve the required depth. (What he actually said was: 'Ah hiv a fush forrya,' but Pat's phonetics are no pleasanter to the eye than they are on the ear, and may be left to the imagination.) 'Under the ledge in the Cuddy Pool. You can have a len' of my fly, if you like.'

Since Pat possessed a large tin box full of assorted invitations to slaughter, 'my fly' in the singular could only mean 'the fly I have invented'.

- 'What is Pat's lure like?' he asked when Pat had taken himself off.
- 'Actionable, I should say,' said his mother. 'A fearsome object.'
- 'Does he catch anything with it?'
- 'Oddly enough, yes,' Tommy said. 'I suppose there are suckers in the fish world just the same as in any other.'
- 'The poor things just gape with astonishment at sight of it,' Laura said, 'and before they have time to shut their mouths the current has swept it in. Tomorrow's Saturday, so you can see it in operation. But I don't think that anything, even Pat's unholy creation, will lure that six-pounder in the Cuddy Pool to the surface with the water the way it is just now.'

And of course Laura was right. Saturday morning was bright and rainless and the six-pounder in the Cuddy Pool was far too dismayed by his imprisonment, far too obsessed with his desire to go higher up the river, to be interested in surface distractions. So it was suggested that Grant should go trout fishing in the loch, with Pat as gillie. The loch was two miles away in the hills, a flat pool on

a bleak bit of moor. When it was windy on Lochan Dhu the gale took your line out of the water at right angles and held it stiff as a telephone wire. When it was calm the midges made a meal of you while the trout came to the surface and openly laughed. But if trout fishing was not Grant's idea of the perfect occupation, being gillie was obviously Patrick's idea of heaven. There was nothing, from riding the black bull down at Dalmore to demanding threepence-worth of sweets from Mrs Mair at the post-office with the aid of a ha'penny and menaces, that Pat was not capable of. But the joy of messing about in a boat was still something that he could not provide for himself. The boat at the loch was padlocked.

So Grant set off up the sandy path through the dry heather, with Pat at his side and one pace in the rear like a gun dog on its best behaviour. And as he went he was conscious of his own reluctance and wondered at it.

Why should there be any qualification in his pleasure this morning, in his delight in going fishing? Brown trout might not be his idea of a sporting contest, but he was glad enough to be spending the day with a rod in his hand even if he caught nothing whatever. He was supremely glad to be out in the open, alive and at leisure, with the familiar spring of peaty turf under his feet, and the hills before him. Why the small unwillingness at the back of his mind? Why, instead of taking a boat out for the day on Lochan Dhu, did he want to hang round the farm?

They had walked for a mile before he had flushed the reason from the cover of his subconscious. He had wanted to stay at Clune today so that he could see the daily paper when it arrived.

He had wanted to find out about B Seven.

His conscious mind had dropped B Seven behind, with the tribulations of the journey and the memory of his humiliation. He had not consciously remembered him from the moment when he fell into bed on arrival until now, nearly twenty-four hours later. But B Seven was still with him, it would seem.

'When does the daily paper arrive at Clune these days?' he asked Pat, still silent and on his best behaviour one pace in the rear.

'If it's Johnny it comes at twelve, but if it's Kenny it's often near one before it comes.' And Pat added, as if glad to have conversation introduced into the expeditionary routine, 'Kenny stops to have a cup at Dalmore, east the road. He's gone on the MacFadyean's Kirsty.'

A world where the news of the nations' clamour waited while Kenny had a cup from the MacFadyean's Kirsty was a very pleasant one, Grant thought. In the days before radio it must have bordered on Paradise.

'That guard the way to Paradise.'

The singing sands.

The beasts that talk,

The streams that stand,

The stones that walk,

The singing sand...

What had it stood for? Was it just a country of the mind?

Out here in the open, in this elemental land, it had an appropriateness that somehow lessened its strangeness. It was quite possible to believe this morning that there were places on this earth where stones might walk. Were there not places, known places, even in the Highlands where a man alone in the bright sunlight of a summer day could be invaded by the knowledge of unseen watchers, so that he was filled with a great fear and ran panic-stricken from the place? Yes, and without any previous interviews in Wimpole Street, either. In the 'old' places anything was possible. Even beasts that talked.

Where had B Seven got his idea of strangeness?

They launched the light boat from its wooden runway, and Grant pulled out into the loch and made for the windward end. It was much too bright, but there was a breath of air that might lift to a breeze strong enough to put a ripple on the surface. He watched Pat put his rod together and bend a fly on the line, and thought that if he could not have the felicity of possessing a son then a small redheaded cousin made a very good substitute.

'Did you ever present a bouquet, Alan?' asked Pat, busy with the fly. He called it 'a bookey'.

'Not that I can remember,' Grant said carefully. 'Why?'

'They're at me to present a bookey to a Viscountess that's coming to open the Dalmore hall.'

'Hall?'

'That shed place at the cross-roads,' Pat said bitterly. He was silent a moment, evidently mulling it over. 'It's an awful jessie-like thing to present a bookey.'

Grant, bound in duty to the absent Laura, searched his mind. 'It's a great honour,' he said.

'Then let The Child have the honour.'

'She is a little young yet for such responsibility.'

'Well, if she's too young for such responsibility I'm too old for such capers. So they'll have to get some other family to do it. It's all havers anyway. The hall's been open for months.'

To this disillusioned contempt for adult pretence Grant had no answer.

They fished turn-about, in a fine male amity; Grant flicking his line with a lazy indifference, Pat with the incurable optimism of his kind. By noon they had drifted back to a point level with the little jetty, and they turned in-shore to make tea on the primus in the little bothy. As Grant was paddling the last few yards he saw Pat's eye fixed on something along the shore, and turned to see what occasioned such marked distaste. Having looked at the advancing figure with its shoggly body and inappropriate magnificence, he asked who that might be.

'That's Wee Archie,' said Pat.

Wee Archie was wielding a shepherd's crook that, as Tommy remarked later, no shepherd would be found dead with, and he was wearing a kilt that no Highlander would dream of being found alive in. The crook stood nearly two feet above his head; and the kilt hung down at the back from his non-existent hips like a draggled petticoat. But it was obvious that the wearer was conscious of no lack. The tartan of his sad little skirt screamed like a peacock, raucous and alien against the moor. His small dark eel's head was

crowned by a pale blue Balmoral with a diced band, the bonnet being pulled down sideways at such a dashing angle that the slack covered his right ear. On the upper side a large piece of vegetation sprouted from the crest on the band. The socks on the hairpin legs were a brilliant blue, and so hairy in texture that they gave the effect of some unfortunate growth. Round the meagre ankles the thongs of the brogues were cross-gartered with a verve that even Malvolio had never achieved.

'What is he doing round here?' Grant asked, fascinated.

'He lives at the inn at Moymore.'

'Oh. What does he do?'

'He's a revolutionary.'

'Really? Is that the same revolution as yours?'

'Nahl' said Pat in great scorn. 'Oh, I'm not saying maybe he didn't put the idea in my head. But no one would take heed of the likes of him. He writes pomes.'

'I take it that he is a once-born.'

'Him! He's not born at all, man. He's a-a-a egg.'

Grant concluded that the word Pat had sought was amoeba, but that knowledge had not reached so far. The lowest form of life he knew of was the egg.

The 'egg' came blithely towards them along the stony beach, swinging the tail of his deplorable petticoat with a fine swagger that went ill with his hirpling movement over the stones. Grant was suddenly convinced that he had corns. Corns on thin pink feet that sweated easily. The kind of feet people were always writing to medical columns in the Press about. (Wash every evening without fail and dry thoroughly, especially between the toes. Dust well with talcum powder and put on fresh socks each morning.)

'Cia mar tha si?' he called as he came within hailing distance.

Was it just chance, Grant wondered, that all cranky people had that thin bodyless voice? Or was it that thin bodyless voices belonged to the failures and the frustrated and that frustration and failure bred the desire to repudiate the herd?

He had not heard that Gaelic phrase since he was a child, and the affectation of it cooled his welcome. He bade the man good-morning.

'Patrick should have told you that it was too bright to fish today,' he said, swinging up to them. Grant did not know which displeased him more: the vile Glasgow speech or the unwarranted patronage.

The freckles on Pat's fair skin were lost in a red tide. Speech trembled on his lips.

'I expect he didn't want to do me out of my pleasure,' Grant said smoothly; and watched the tide recede and a slow appreciation dawn. Pat had discovered that there were more effective ways of dealing with folly than direct attack. It was a quite new idea and he was trying the taste of it, rolling it on his tongue.

'You've come ashore for your elevenses, I take it,' Wee Archie said brightly. 'I'll be glad to join you if you've no objection.'

So they made tea for Wee Archie, glum and polite. He produced his own sandwiches, and while they ate he lectured them on the glory of Scotland; its mighty past and dazzling future. He had not asked Grant's name and was betrayed by his speech into taking him for an Englishman. Surprised, Grant heard of England's iniquities to a captive and helpless Scotland. (Anything less captive or less helpless than the Scotland he had known would be difficult to imagine.) England, it seemed, was a blood-sucker, a vampire, draining the good blood of Scotland and leaving her limp and white. Scotland had groaned under the foreign yoke, she had come staggering behind the conqueror's chariot, she had paid tribute and prostituted her talents to the tyrant's needs. But she was about to throw off the yoke, to unloose the bands; the fiery cross was about to be sent out once more, and soon the heather would be alight. There was no cliché that Wee Archie spared them.

Grant watched him with the interest one accords to a new exhibit in a collection. He decided that the man was older than he had thought. Forty-five at least; probably nearer fifty. Too old to be curable. Whatever success he had coveted had passed him by; there would never be anything for him but his pitiable fancy-dress and his clichés.

He looked across to see what effect this perversion of patriotism was having on Young Scotland, and rejoiced in his heart. Young Scotland was sitting facing the loch, as if even the sight of Wee Archie was too much for him. He was chewing in a dogged detachment, and his eye reminded Grant of Flurry Knox: 'an eye like a stone wall with broken glass on top'. The revolutionaries would want heavier guns than Archie to make any impression on their countrymen.

Grant wondered what the creature lived on. 'Pomes' did not provide a living. Nor did free-lance journalism; or, rather, the kind of journalism that Archie was likely to write. Perhaps he scraped a living from 'criticism'. It was from the ranks of the ineffective that the minor critics were recruited. There was always the chance, of course, that he was subsidised; if not by some native malcontent with a thirst for power, then by some foreign agency with an interest in trouble-making. He was of a type very familiar to the Special Branch: the failure, sick of a curdled vanity.

Grant, still hankering after that midday newspaper that Johnny or Kenny was due to deliver at Clune, had had thoughts of suggesting to Pat that they call it a day, and give up enticing fish that had no intention of biting. But if they went now they would have to walk back in Wee Archie's company, and that was something to be avoided. So he prepared to resume his idle flicking of the loch water.

But Archie, it seemed, was anxious to make one of the fishing party. If there was room in the boat for a third passenger, he said, he would be glad to accompany them.

Again speech trembled on Pat's lips.

'Yes,' said Grant, 'do come. You can help to bale.'

'Bale?' said the saviour of Scotland, blenching.

'Yes. Her seams are not too good. She makes a lot of water.'

On second thoughts Archie decided that perhaps after all it was time that he was wending his way (Archie never went anywhere, he always wended his way) towards Moymore. The post would be in, and there would be his mail to deal with. And then, lest it might cross their minds that he was unused to boats, he told them how good he was in a boat. It was thanks only to his skill in a boat that he

and four others had reached a Hebridean beach alive last summer. He told the tale with a growing verve that gave rise to a base suspicion that he was making it up as he went along, and having finished he switched hastily from the subject, as if afraid of questions, and asked if Grant knew the islands.

Grant, locking up the bothy and pocketing the key, said that he did not. Whereupon Archie made him free of them with a proprietor's generosity. The herring fleets of Lewis, the cliffs of Mingulay, the songs of Barra, the hills of Harris, the wild flowers of Benbecula, and the sands, the endless wonderful white sand, of Berneray.

'The sands don't sing, I suppose,' Grant said, putting bounds to the boasting. He stepped into the boat, and pushed off.

'No,' said Wee Archie, 'no. They're in Cladda.'

'What are?' asked Grant, startled.

'The singing sands. Well, good fishing to you, but it's not a day for fishing, you know. Much too bright.'

And with this kindly pat on the head he re-erected his shepherd's crook, and swung away along the shore towards Moymore and his letters. Grant stood motionless in the boat, watching him go. When he was nearly beyond earshot he called to him suddenly:

'Are there any walking stones on Cladda?'

'What?' said Archie's inadequate pipe.

'Are there any walking stones on Cladda?'

'No. They're in Lewis.'

And the dragonfly creature with its mosquito voice went away into the brown distance.

They came home at tea-time with five unimpressive-looking trout and large appetites. Pat, excusing the thin trout, pointed out that on such a day you couldn't expect to catch any but what he called 'the sillies'; the respect-worthy fish had more sense than to be caught in such weather. They came down the last half-mile to Clune like homing horses, Pat skipping from turf to turf like a young goat and as voluble as he had been silent on the way out. The world and London river seemed the width of stellar space away, and Grant would not have called the King his cousin.

But as they scraped their shoes at the flagged doorway of Clune, he became aware of his unreasonable impatience to see that newspaper. And since he resented unreason in anyone and abominated it in himself he carefully scraped his shoes all over a second time.

'Man, you're awfully particular,' said Pat, giving his footgear a rudimentary wipe on the twin scraper.

'It's a boorish thing to go into a house with mud on one's shoes.'

'Boorish?' asked Pat, who, as Grant suspected, held it a 'jessie-like' thing to be clean.

'Yes. Slovenly and un-grown-up.'

'Huh,' said Pat; and surreptitiously scraped his shoes again. 'It's a poor house that can't stand a few dollops of mud,' he said, reasserting his independence, and went storming into the sitting-room like an invading army.

In the sitting-room Tommy was dripping honey on to a hot scone, Laura was pouring tea, Bridget was arranging a new set of objects in a design on the floor, and the terrier was on the make round the table. Except that sunlight had been added to firelight it was the same picture as last night. With one difference. Somewhere in the room there was a daily paper that mattered.

Laura, seeing his searching eye, asked him if he was looking for something.

'Yes, the daily paper.'

'Oh, Bella has it.' Bella was the cook. 'I'll get it from her after tea if you want to see it.'

He had a moment of stinging impatience with her. She was far too complacent. She was far too happy, here in her fastness, with her laden tea-table, and her little roll of fat above the belt, and her healthy children, and her nice Tommy, and her security. It would do her good to have some demons to fight; to be swung out in space and held over some bottomless pit now and then. But his own absurdity rescued him, and he knew that it was not so. There was no complacence in Laura's happiness, nor was Clune any refuge from the realities. The two young sheep-dogs who had welcomed them at the road gate in a swirl of black-and-white bodies and lashing tails would once upon a time have been called Moss, or Glen, or Trim or something like that. Today, he had noticed, they answered to Tong and Zang. The waters of the Chindwin had long ago flowed into the Turlie. There were no Ivory Towers any more.

'There is *The Times*, of course,' Laura said, 'but it is always yesterday's, so you will have seen it.'

'Who is Wee Archie?' he asked, sitting down at the table.

'So you've met Archie Brown, have you?' Tommy said, clapping the top half on his hot scone, and licking the honey that oozed from it

'Is that his name?'

'It used to be. Since he elected himself the champion of Gaeldom he calls himself Gilleasbuig Mac-a'-Bruithainn. He's frightfully unpopular at hotels.'

'Why?'

'How would *you* like to page someone called Gilleasbuig Mac-a'-Bruithainn?'

'I wouldn't like to have him under my roof at all. What is he doing here?'

'He's writing an epic poem in Gaelic, so he says. He didn't know any Gaelic until about two years ago, so I don't think the poem can be up to much. He used to belong to the cleesh-clavers-clatter school. You know: the Lowland-Scots boys. He was one of them for years. But he didn't get anywhere very much. The competition was too keen. So he decided that Lowland Scots was just debased English and very reprehensible, and that there was nothing like a return to the "old tongue", to a real language. So he "sat under" a bank clerk in Glasgow, a chap from Uist, and swotted up some Gaelic. He comes to the back door and talks to Bella now and then, but she says she doesn't understand a word. She thinks he's "not right in the head".'

'There's nothing wrong with Archie Brown's head,' Laura said tartly. 'If he hadn't had the wit to think up this rôle for himself he would be teaching school in some god-forsaken backwater and even the school inspector wouldn't have known his name.'

'He's very conspicuous on a moor, anyhow,' Grant said.

'He's even worse on a platform. Like one of those awful souvenir dolls that tourists take home; and just about as Scottish.'

'Isn't he Scots?'

'No. He hasn't a drop of Scottish blood in him. His father came from Liverpool and his mother was an O'Hanrahan.'

'Odd how all the most bigoted patriots are Auslanders,' Grant said. 'I don't think he'll get very far with those xenophobes, the Gaels.'

'He has a much worse handicap than that,' Laura said.

'What is that?'

'His Glasgow accent.'

'Yes. It is pretty repellent.'

'I didn't mean that. I mean, every time he opens his mouth his audience is reminded of the possibility of being ruled from Glasgow: a fate worse than death.'

'When he was talking about the beauty of the Islands he mentioned some sands that "sing". Do you know anything about them?'

'I seem to,' said Tommy, not interested. 'On Barra or Berneray or somewhere.'

'On Cladda, he said.'

'Yes, perhaps it's Cladda. Do you think that boat at Lochan Dhu will last a season or two yet?'

'Can I go and get the *Clarion* from Bella now?' asked Pat, having wolfed four scones and a slab of cake with the neat speed of a sheep-dog consuming a stolen tit-bit.

'If she has finished with it,' his mother said.

'Uch, she'll have finished with it this long time,' Pat said. 'She only reads the bits about the stars.' 'Stars?' said Grant, as the door closed behind Pat. 'Film stars?'

'No,' Laura said. 'The Great Bear and Co.'

'Oh. The day as arranged by Sirius, Vega, and Capella.'

'Yes. In Lewis they have to wait for the second-sight, she says. It's a fine convenient thing to have the future in the paper every day.'

'What does Pat want with the Clarion?'

'The strip, of course. Two objects called Tolly and Snib. I can't remember whether they are ducks or rabbits.'

So Grant had to wait until Pat had finished with Tolly and Snib, and by that time both Laura and Tommy had taken themselves off, the one to the kitchen and the other to out-of-doors, so that he was left alone with the silent child on the mat, endlessly rearranging her treasures. He took the tidily-folded paper from Pat ceremoniously, and as Pat went away he unfolded it with controlled interest. It was a Scottish edition and apart from the 'middles' the paper was crammed with the most parochial of news, but there seemed to be nothing about yesterday's railway event in it. To and fro he went, through the jungle of unimportances, like a terrier routing through bracken, and at last he came on it: a tiny paragraph at the bottom of a column, down among the bicycle accidents and the centenarians. 'MAN DIES IN TRAIN', said the inconspicuous heading. And under the heading was a succinct statement:

On the arrival of the *Flying Highlander* at its destination yesterday morning it was found that one of the passengers, a young Frenchman, Charles Martin, had died during the night. It is understood that the death was due to natural causes, but since the death occurred in England, the body is being returned to London for an inquest.

'French!' he said aloud, and Bridget looked up from her playthings to watch him.

French? Surely not! Surely not?

The face, yes. Perhaps. The face quite likely. But not that writing. That very English, schoolboy writing.

Had the paper not belonged to B Seven at all?

Had he just picked it up? In a restaurant where he was having a meal before boarding the train, perhaps. The chairs of station dining-rooms were habitually strewn with the discarded papers of those who had eaten there. Or in his home, for that matter; or his rooms or wherever he lived. He might have come by the paper in a score of casual ways.

Or, of course, he might be a Frenchman who was educated in England, so that the round untidy script was substituted for the slanting elegant spidery handwriting of his inheritance. There was nothing fundamentally incompatible with B Seven having been the author of those pencilled lines.

All the same, it was an oddity.

And in cases of sudden death, however natural, oddities have importance. When he first came in contact with B Seven he was so divorced from his professional self, so detached from the world at large, that he had considered the matter as any other sleep-sodden civilian would. B Seven had been for him merely the young dead occupant of a whisky-sodden compartment who was being mauled about by a furiously impatient sleeping-car attendant. Now he became something quite different; he became The Subject Of An Inquest. A professional matter; a matter bound by rules and regulations; a matter to be proceeded with circumspectly, with due decorum and by the book. And it occurred to Grant for the first time that his abstraction of that newspaper might be held, if orthodoxy must be pushed to its furthest point, to be a little irregular. It had been an entirely unintended abstraction; an accidental purloining. But it had, if one had to be analytical about it, been a removal of evidence.

While Grant was debating the matter, Laura came back from the kitchen and said: 'Alan, I want you to do something for me.'

She took her mending basket and brought it over to a chair beside him.

'Anything I can do.'

'Pat is sticking in his toes about something that he has to do and I want you to talk him into it. You're his hero, and he will listen to you.'

'It isn't about presenting a bouquet, by any chance?'

'How did you know? Has he talked about it to you already?'

'He just mentioned it this morning on the loch.'

'You didn't take his side, did you?'

'With you in the background! No. I expressed the opinion that it was a great honour.'

'Was he convinced?'

'No. He thinks the whole thing is "havers".'

'So it is. The hall has been in unofficial use for weeks. But the glen people spent a lot of money and energy on getting that thing put up, and it is only right that it should be opened with a "splash".'

'But does it have to be Pat who presents the bouquet?'

'Yes. If he doesn't do it, the MacFadyean's Willie will.'

'Laura, you shock me.'

'I wouldn't if you could see the MacFadyean's Willie. He looks like a frog with elephantiasis. And his socks are always falling down. It should be a little girl's business, but there is no female child of the right age in the glen. So it rests between Pat and the MacFadyean's Willie. And quite apart from Pat's looking nicer, it is right that someone from Clune should do it. And don't say

"Why?" and don't say I shock you. You just see what you can do to talk Pat into it.'

'I'll try,' Grant said, smiling at her. 'Who is his Viscountess?'

- 'Lady Kentallen.'
- 'The dowager?'
- 'The widow, you mean. There is only one, so far. Her boy isn't old enough yet to be married.'
- 'How did you get her?'
- 'She was at school with me. At St Louisa's.'
- 'Oh: blackmail. The tyranny of auld lang syne.'
- 'Tyranny nothing,' said Laura. 'She was glad to come and do the chore. She's a darling.'
- 'The best way to bring Pat up to his bit would be to make her attractive in his eyes.'
- 'She's ragingly attractive.'
- 'I don't mean that way. I mean, make her good at something he admires.'
- 'She's an expert with a fly,' Laura said doubtfully, 'but I don't know that Pat would find that very impressive. He just thinks that someone who can't fish is abnormal.'
 - 'I suppose you couldn't endow her with a few revolutionary tendencies.'

'Revolutionary!' said Laura, her eye brightening. 'Now that's an idea. Revolutionary. She used to be a little on the pink side. She did it "to annoy Miles and Georgiana", she used to say. They are her parents. She was never very serious about it; she was much too good-looking to need anything like that. But I might build something on that foundation. Yes. We might make her a revolutionary.'

The quirks that women are reduced to! thought Grant, watching her needle nicker through the wool of the sock she was darning; and went back to considering his own problem. He was still considering it when he went to bed. But before he went to sleep he decided that he would write to Bryce in the morning. It would be to all intents a letter reporting his arrival in these healthful surroundings and his hope to be better in less time than the doctor had given him, but in the course of it he would take the opportunity of putting himself in the right by passing the knowledge of the newspaper's presence on to those whom it might concern.

He slept the deep uninterrupted sleep induced by fresh air and an unsullied conscience, and woke to an immense silence. The silence was not only out-of-doors; the house itself was in a trance. And Grant suddenly remembered that it was Sunday. There would be no post out of the glen today. He would have to go all the way to Scoone with his letter.

He asked Tommy at breakfast if he might borrow the car to go to Scoone to post an important letter, and Laura offered to drive him. So as soon as breakfast was over he went back to his room to compose the letter, and in the end was very pleased with it. He brought the matter of B Seven into the texture of it as neatly as an invisible mender fits an unbelonging piece to the over-all pattern. He had not been able to shake the memory of work from him as soon as he might, he said, because the first thing he had been confronted with at the end of the journey was a dead body. The body was being furiously shaken by an enraged sleeping-car attendant who thought that the man was just sleeping it off. However, it had been none of his business, thank Heaven. His only part in the affair had been to purloin unintentionally a newspaper from the compartment. He had found it among his own when he was having breakfast. It was a *Signal*, and he would have taken it for granted that it was his own property if it had not been that in the Stop Press space someone had been pencilling a scribbled attempt at verse. The verse was in English and in English writing, and might not have been written by the dead man at all. He understood that the inquest was being held in London. If Bryce thought that it was of any importance he might hand on the small item of information to the relevant authority.

He came downstairs again to find the Sabbath atmosphere shattered. The house rocked with war and rebellion. Pat had discovered that someone was going in to Scoone (which in his country eyes was even on a Sunday a metropolis of delectable variety) and he wanted to go too. His mother, on the other hand, was determined that he was going to Sunday school as usual.

'You ought to be very glad of the lift,' she was saying, 'instead of grumbling about not wanting to go.'

Grant thought that 'grumbling' was a highly inadequate word to describe the blazing opposition that lighted Pat like a torch. He throbbed with it, like a car at rest with the engine running.

'If we didn't happen to be going in to Scoone you would have to walk to the church as usual,' she reminded him.

'Huch, who ever minds walking! We have fine talks when we're walking, Duggie and me.' Duggie was the shepherd's son. 'It's wasting time at Sunday school when I might be going to Scoone that's a fact. It's not fair.'

- 'Pat, I will not have you referring to Sunday school as a waste of time.'
- 'You won't have me at all if you're not careful. I'll die of a decline.'
- 'Oh. What would bring that on?'
- 'Lack of fresh air.'

She began to laugh. 'Pat, you're wonderful!' But it was always the wrong thing to laugh at Pat. He took himself as seriously as an animal does.

- 'All right, laugh!' he said bitterly. 'You'll be going to church on Sundays to put wreaths on my grave, that's what you'll be doing on Sundays, not going into Scoone!'
- 'I shouldn't dream of doing anything so extravagant. A few dog-daisies now and then when I'm passing is as much as you'll get from me. Go and get your scarf; you'll need it.'
 - 'A gravat! It's March!'
 - 'It's also cold. Get your scarf. It will help to keep off that decline.'
- 'A lot you care about my decline, you and your daisies. A mean family the Grants always were. A poor mean lot. I'm very glad I'm a Rankin, and I'm very glad I don't have to wear their horrible red tartan.' Pat's tattered green kilt was Macintyre, which went better with his red hair than the gay Grant. It had been part of Tommy's mother's web, and she, as a good Macintyre, had been glad to see her grandson in what she called a civilised cloth.

He stumped his way into the back of the car and sat there simmering, the despised 'gravat' flung in a limp disavowed heap at the far end of the seat.

'Heathen aren't supposed to go to church,' he offered, as they slipped down the sandy road to the gate, the loose stones spurting from under the tyres.

'Who is heathen?' his mother asked, her mind on the road.

'I am. I'm a Mohammedan.'

'Then you have great need to go to a Christian church and be converted. Open the gate, Pat.'

'I've no wish to be converted. I'm fine as I am.' He held the gate open for them and shut it behind them. 'I disapprove of the Bible,' he said, as he got in again.

'Then you can't be a good Mohammedan.'

'What for no?'

'They have some of the Bible too.'

'I bet they don't have David!'

'Don't you approve of David?' Grant asked.

'A poor soppy thing, dancing and singing like a lassie. There's not a soul in the Old Testament I'd trust to go to a sheep sale.'

He sat erect in the middle of the back seat, too alive with rebellion to relax, his bleak eye watching the road ahead in absent-minded fury. And it occurred to Grant that he might equally have slumped in a corner and sulked. He was glad that this cousin of his was a rude and erect flame of resentment and not a small collapsed bundle of self-pity.

The injured heathen got out at the church, still rude and erect, and walked away without a backward glance, to join the small group of children by the side door.

'Will he behave, now he is there?' Grant asked as Laura set the car in motion again.

'Oh, yes. He really likes it, you know. And of course Douglas will be there: his Jonathan. A day when he couldn't spend part of it laying down the law to Duggie would be a day wasted. He didn't really believe that I would let him come to Scoone instead. It was just a try-on.'

'It was a very effective try-on.'

'Yes. There's a lot of the actor in Pat.'

They had gone another two miles before the thought of Pat faded from his mind. And, then, quite suddenly, into the blank that Pat's departure left, came the realisation that he was in a car. That he was shut into a car. He ceased on the instant to be an adult watching, tolerant and amused, the unreasonable antics of a child, and became a child watching, gibbering and aghast, the hostile advance of giants.

He let down the window on his side to its fullest extent. 'Let me know if you feel that too much,' he said.

'You've been too long in London,' she said.

'How?'

'Only people who live in towns are fresh-air fiends. Country people like a nice fug as a change from unlimited out-of-doors.'

'I'll put it up, if you like,' he said, although his mouth was stiff with effort as he said the words.

'No, of course not,' she said, and began to talk about a car they had ordered.

So the old battle started. The old arguments, the old tricks, the old cajoling. The pointing out of the open windows, the reminding himself that it was only a car and could be stopped at any moment, the willing himself to consider a subject far removed from the present, the self-persuading that he was lucky to be alive at all. But the tide of his panic rose with a slow abominable menace. A black evil tide, scummy and revolting. Now it was round his chest, pressing and holding, so that he could hardly breathe. Now it was up to his throat, feeling round his windpipe, clutching his neck in a pincer embrace. In a moment it would be over his mouth.

'Lalla, stop!'

'Stop the car?' she asked, surprised.

'Yes.'

She brought the car to a standstill, and he got out on trembling legs and hung over the dry-stone dyke sucking in great mouthfuls of the clean air.

'Are you feeling ill, Alan?' she asked anxiously.

'No, I just wanted to get out of the car.'

'Oh,' she said in a relieved tone. 'Is that all!'

'Is that all?'

'Yes: claustrophobia. I was afraid you were ill.'

'And you don't call that being ill?' he said bitterly.

'Of course not. I nearly died of terror once, when I was taken to see the Cheddar caves. I had never been in a cave before.' She had switched off the motor and now she sat down on a roadside boulder with her back half-turned to him. 'Except those rabbit burrows that we called caves in our youth.' She held up her cigarette case to him. 'I'd never been really underground before, and I didn't mind going in the least. I went all eager and delighted, I was a good half-mile from the entrance when it struck me. I sweated with terror. Do you have it often?'

'Yes.'

'Do you know that you're the only person who still calls me Lalla sometimes? We are getting very old.'

He looked round and down at her, the strain fading from his expression.

'I didn't know you had any terrors other than rats.

'Oh, yes. I have a fine variety. Everyone has, I think. At least everyone who is not just a clod. I keep placid because I lead a placid life and collect adipose tissue. If I overworked the way you do I'd be a raving maniac. I'd probably have claustrophobia *and* agoraphobia, and make medical history. One would have the enormous consolation of being something in the *Lancet*, of course.'

He turned from leaning over the wall and sat down beside her. 'Look,' he said, and held out the shaking hand that held his cigarette

for her to see.

'Poor Alan.'

'Poor Alan indeed,' he agreed. 'That came not from being half a mile underground in the dark, but from being a passenger in a car with wide-open windows in an open countryside on a fine Sunday in a free country.'

'It didn't, of course.'

'It didn't?'

'It came from four years of consistent overwork and an overgrown conscience. You always were a demon where conscience was concerned. Quite tiresome you could be. Would you rather have a spot of claustrophobia or a stroke?'

'A stroke?'

'If you work yourself half to death you have to pay in some manner or other. Would you rather pay in the more usual physical manner with high blood-pressure or a strained heart? It's better to be scared of being shut into a car than to be pushed about in a bathchair. At least you have time off from being scared. If you hate the thought of getting back into the car, by the way, I can go on to Scoone with your letter and pick you up on the way back.'

'Oh, no, I'll go on.'

'I thought it was better not to fight it?'

'Did you scream and yell half a mile underground in the Cheddar Gorge?'

'No. But I wasn't a pathological specimen suffering from overwork.'

He smiled suddenly. 'It's extraordinary how comforting it is to be called a pathological specimen. Or rather, to be called a pathological specimen in just those tones.'

'Do you remember the day at Varese when it rained and we went to the museum and saw those specimens in bottles?'

'Yes; you were sick on the pavement outside.'

'Well, you were sick when we had sheep's heart for lunch because you had watched it being stuffed,' she said instantly.

'Lalla, darling,' he said, beginning to laugh, 'you haven't grown-up at all.'

'Well, it's nice that you can still laugh, even if it's only at me,' she said, caught out in that flash of childhood rivalry. 'Say when you want to go on.'

'Now.'

'Now? Are you sure?'

'Quite sure. Being called a pathological specimen has wonderfully curative qualities, I find.'

'Well, next time don't wait until you are on the point of suffocation,' she said matter-of-factly.

He did not know which he found more reassuring: her awareness that the thing was a sort of suffocation or her matter-of-fact acceptance of unreason.

If Grant had imagined that his chief would be gratified either by the possibility of his earlier recovery or by his punctiliousness in the matter of the newspaper, he was wrong. Bryce was still antagonist rather than colleague. And his reply contained a right-and-left that was typically Bryce. Reading it, Grant thought that only Bryce could manage to have his cake and eat it so successfully. In the first paragraph he rebuked Grant for his unprofessional conduct in abstracting any article from the vicinity of sudden and unexplained death. In the second paragraph he was surprised that Grant should have thought of bothering a busy Department with any matter as trivial as that of the purloined paper, but supposed that no doubt his divorce from workaday surroundings had contributed to a lack of judgement and proportion. There was no third paragraph.

What came off the familiar thin office paper was a strong impression that he had been put, not in his place, but outside. What the letter really said was: 'I can't imagine why you, Alan Grant, should be bothering us, either to report on your health or to take an interest in our business. We are not interested in the one and you have no concern with the other.' He was an outsider. A renegade.

And it was only now, reading the snubbing letter and having the door banged in his face, that he became aware that beyond his conscientious need to put himself straight with the Department over the purloined paper had been the desire to hang on to B Seven. His letter, as well as an apology, had been a way to information. There was no longer hope of obtaining information from the Press. B Seven was not news. Every day people died in trains. There was nothing to interest the lieges in that. As far as the Press was concerned B Seven was dead twice over, once in fact and once as news. But he had wanted to know more about B Seven, and he had hoped without knowing it that his colleagues might be chatty on the subject.

He might have known Bryce better, he thought, tearing up the sheet of paper and dropping it into the wastepaper basket. However, there was always Sergeant Williams, thank Heaven; the faithful Williams. Williams would wonder why someone of his rank and experience should be interested in an unknown dead body seen once for a moment or two, but he would probably put it down to boredom. In any case there would be no lack of chat about Williams. So to Williams he wrote. Would Williams find out what the result of the inquest had been on a young man, Charles Martin, who had died on Thursday night a week ago on the night train to the Highlands; and anything else about the young man that might have transpired in the course of the inquiry. And kind regards to Mrs Williams and Angela and Leonard.

And for two days he settled back in a sort of happy impatience to wait for Williams's reply. He inspected the unfishable Turlie, pool by pool; he caulked the boat at Lochan Dhu; he walked the hill in the company of Graham the shepherd with Tong and Zang more or less at heel; and he listened to Tommy's plan for a nine-hole private golf course between the house and the hillside. And on the third day he went homing at post time with an eagerness he had not known since he was nineteen and used to send his poems to magazines.

Nor was his blank unbelief when there was nothing for him any less poignant than it had been in those callow years.

He reminded himself that he was being unreasonable. (The unforgivable sin, always, in Grant's estimation.) The inquest had nothing to do with the Department. He did not even know which Division might have been landed with the job. Williams would have to find out. Williams had work of his own; twenty-four-hours-a-day work. It was unreasonable to expect him to drop everything to satisfy some holiday-making colleague's frivolous questions.

For two more days he waited, and then it came.

Williams hoped that Grant wasn't hankering after work. He was supposed to be having a rest, and everyone in the Department hoped that he was getting it (not everyone! thought Grant, remembering Bryce) and feeling the better for it. They missed him very badly. As to Charles Martin, there was no mystery about him. Or about his death, if that is what Grant had been thinking. He had hit the back of his head against the edge of the porcelain wash-hand basin, and although able to crawl around for a little on his hands and knees and eventually reach the bed, he had died from internal haemorrhage very shortly after falling over. The fact that he had fallen backwards at all was due to the amount of neat whisky he had consumed. Not enough to make him drunk but quite enough to make him muzzy, and the tilt of the coach as it changed direction had done the rest. There was no mystery either about the man himself. He had had the usual bundle of French identity papers in his possession, and his people were still living at his home address near Marseilles. They had not seen him for some years—he had left home after being in trouble for stabbing his girl in a fit of jealousy—but they had sent money to bury him so that he should not be buried in a pauper's grave.

This left Grant with an appetite whetted rather than assuaged.

He waited until, according to his reckoning, Williams would be happily settled down with his pipe and his paper, while Mrs Williams mended and Angela and Leonard did their homework, and put in a personal call to him. There was always the chance that Williams was out pursuing the ill-doer through the devious ways of his inhabiting, but there was, too, the chance that he was at home.

He was at home.

When he had been duly thanked for his letter, Grant said: 'You said his people sent money to bury him. Didn't anyone come to identify him?'

- 'No; they identified a photograph.'
- 'A live photograph?'
- 'No, no. A photograph of the body.'
- 'Didn't anyone turn up to identify him in London?'
- 'Not a soul, it seems,'
- 'That's odd.
- 'Not so odd if he was a wide boy. Wide boys don't want trouble.'
- 'Was there any suggestion that he was wide?'

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'No, I don't think so.'
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- 'What was his profession?'
- 'Mechanic.'
- 'Did he have a passport?'
- 'No. Just the usual papers. And letters.'
- 'Oh, he had letters?'
- 'Yes; the usual odd two or three that people carry. One was from a girl saying she would wait for him. She's going to wait some time.'
 - 'Were the letters in French?'
 - 'Yes.'
 - 'What money had he?'
- 'Wait a minute till I find my notes. Um—m—m. Twenty-two, ten, in mixed notes; eighteen and tuppence ha'penny in silver and copper.'
 - 'All English?'
 - 'Yes.'
- 'Between the lack of passport and the English currency it looks as if he had been in England a good long time. I wonder why no one came to claim him.'
 - 'They may not know yet that he is dead. It didn't get much publicity.'
 - 'Didn't he have any address in Britain?'
 - 'He had no address on him. The letters were not in envelopes: just in his wallet. His friends will probably turn up yet.'
 - 'Does anyone know where he was going? Or why?'
 - 'No; seemingly not.'
 - 'What luggage had he?'
 - 'An overnight case. Shirt, socks, pyjamas and bedroom slippers. No laundry marks.'
 - 'What? Why? Were the things new?
 - 'No, oh, no.' Williams sounded amused at Grant's overt suspicion. 'Very well worn.'
 - 'Maker's name in the slippers?'
 - 'No; those hand-made thick leather things you find in North African bazaars and in the Mediterranean ports.'
 - 'What else?'
 - 'In the case? A New Testament in French, and a yellow paper-backed novel, also in French. Both well worn.'
 - 'Your three minutes are up,' said the Post Office.

Grant had another three minutes, but he got no nearer an explanation of B Seven. Apart from the fact that he had no record, either in France (the stabbing had been merely a domestic incident, it seemed) or in Britain, nothing was known of him. It was indeed typical that the one positive thing about him should be a negation.

- 'By the way,' Williams said, 'when I was writing I quite forgot to answer your postscript.'
- 'What postscript?' Grant asked, and then remembered that he had written as an afterthought:
- 'If you ever have nothing better to do you might ask the Special Branch if they are interested at all in a man called Archibald Brown. Scottish patriot. Ask for Ted Hanna and tell him I was asking.'
 - 'Oh, yes, of course. About the patriot. Did you have time to do anything about it? It wasn't important.'
- 'Well, as it happened, I met your reference on a Whitehall bus, day before yesterday. He says he has nothing against your bird but they would very much like to know who the ravens are. Do you know what he was talking about?'
 - 'I think I do,' Grant said, amused. 'I'll do my best to find out for them. Just as a piece of holiday homework, tell him.'
- 'You keep your mind off your work, if you please, and get well enough to be back here before the place falls to pieces without you.'
 - 'The shoes he was wearing: where were they made?'
 - 'Who was wearing? Oh. Yes. Karachi.'
 - 'Where?'
 - 'Karachi.'
 - "Yes, that's what I thought you said. He seems to have got around. No name on the fly-leaf of the Testament?"
 - 'Don't think so. I don't think I made any note of that when I read the evidence. Just a minute. Oh, yes, I did. No name.'
 - 'And no one in "missing persons" that fits him?'
 - 'No. No one. No one even approximately like him, it seems. He isn't "missing" from anywhere.'
- 'Well, it was wonderful of you to go to all that trouble for me instead of telling me to go fish in my burn. I'll do as much for you some day.'
 - 'Are the fish in your burn biting?'
- 'There's hardly any burn, and the fish are cowering in the deepest recesses of the remaining pools. That is why I am reduced to taking an interest in cases that aren't worth a flicker of real interest in busy places like South West One.'

But he knew that that was not so. It was not boredom that had driven him to this interest in B Seven. This—he had almost said—alliance. He had a curious feeling of identification with B Seven. Not in the sense of being one, but in the sense of having an identity of interests. This, in view of the fact that he had seen him only once and knew nothing whatever about him, was highly unreasonable. Was it perhaps that he had thought of B Seven as also wrestling with demons? Had the feeling of personal interest, the championship, begun in that?

He had supposed that B Seven's Paradise had been oblivion. He had supposed that because of the whisky-sodden fug in the compartment. But the young man had not after all been sodden. He had not indeed been very drunk. Just tipsy. His flying backwards fall against the solid round bulk of the basin had been the kind of thing that might happen to anyone. His so-strangely guarded Paradise had not after all been oblivion.

He caught his attention back to what Williams was saying.

- 'What's that?'
- 'I forgot to say that the sleeping-car attendant is of the opinion that Martin was seen off by someone at Euston.'
- 'Why is this an afterthought?'
- 'Well, I gather that he wasn't much of a help anyway, the sleeping-car chap. He seemed to treat the whole thing as a personal insult, the sergeant who was there said.'

Old Yughourt seemed to have run very true to form.

'What did he say?'

'He said that when he walked through the corridor, at Euston, Martin had someone with him in the compartment. Another man. He didn't see the man because Martin was facing him and the door was half-open, so that all he noticed was that Martin was talking to another man. They seemed very happy and friendly. They were talking about robbing a hotel.'

'What!'

'You see what I mean? The coroner said "What!" too. The railway chap said that they were talking about "robbing the Caley" and since no one could rob a football team it must have been a hotel. It seems that all the hotels in Scotland that are not called Waverley are called Caledonian. Popularly known as "Caley". They weren't serious about it, he said.'

'And that was all he saw of the see-er-off?'

'Yes, that was all.'

'He mightn't have been a see-er-off at all. He might have been just a friend who came across him on the train. Saw his name on the sleeper list, or noticed him in passing.'

'Yes; except that you'd expect a friend to turn up again in the morning.'

'Not necessarily. Especially if he was far down the train. And the removal of the body would have been so discreet that I doubt if any passengers knew that someone had died. The station was clear of passengers long before the ambulance arrived. I know, because the ambulance fuss was taking place when I had nearly finished breakfast.'

'Yes. The sleeping-car chap said he took it for granted that the other man was a see-er-off because he was standing in hat and coat. Mostly, he says, when people go coffee-housing along the train they take their hats off. It's the first thing they do, he says: throw their hat on a rack. When they get to their compartment, I mean.'

'Talking of names on the sleeper list, how was the berth booked?'

'By phone; but he picked up the ticket himself. At least, it was picked up by a thin dark man. Booked a week in advance.'

'All right. Go on about Yughourt.'

'About who?'

'About the sleeping-car attendant.'

'Oh. Well. He said that when he came down the train collecting tickets, about twenty minutes out from Euston, Martin had gone to the lavatory, but his sleeper ticket and the outward half of his ticket to Scoone were lying ready on the little shelf below the mirror. He took them and marked them off in his book, and as he was passing the lavatory he knocked at the door and said: "Are you in B Seven, sir?" Martin said yes. The attendant said: "I've taken your tickets, thank you, sir. Will you be wanting tea in the morning?" And Martin said: "No, thank you; good-night."

'So he had a return ticket.'

'Yes. The return half was in his wallet.'

'Well, it's all straightforward enough, it seems. Even the lack of anyone to make inquiries about him, or to claim his body, may be due to the fact that he was off on a trip and people didn't expect to hear from him.'

'That and the lack of publicity. I don't suppose his people even bothered to put an announcement in an English paper; they would just announce it in their own local affair, where people knew him.'

'What did the P.M. say?'

'Oh, the usual. Light meal about an hour before death, large quantity of whisky in stomach and a fair amount in the blood. Quite enough to make him tight.'

'No suggestion that he was a soak?'

'Oh, no. No degeneration of any kind. Head and shoulder injuries at some earlier period, but otherwise good healthy specimen. Not to say tough.'

'So he had some earlier injury?'

'Yes, but a long time ago. I mean, nothing to do with this. He had at some time had a fractured skull and a broken collar-bone. Would it be very bad-mannered or very indiscreet of me to ask why all this interest in a simple case?'

'So help me, sergeant, if I knew I would tell you. I think I must be getting childish.'

'It's more likely that you're just bored,' Williams said sympathetically. 'Me, I was brought up in the country and I was never a one for watching the grass grow. An over-rated place, the country. Everything's too far away. Once that burn of yours starts flowing you'll forget about Mr Martin. It's pouring stair-rods here so you probably won't have long to wait for rain now.'

It did not, in fact, rain that night in the Turlie valley, but something else happened. The cold bright stillness gave place to a light wind. The wind was soft and warm, the air hung damp and heavy between gusts, the earth was moist and slippery, and down from the high tops came the snow water, filling the river bed from bank to bank. And up the brown racing water came the fish, flashing silver in the light as they leaped over the broken ledges of rock and up the narrow sluicing current between the boulders. Pat took his precious

invention from his fly case (where it had a special compartment of its own) and presented it to Grant with the formal benevolence of a headmaster handing over a certificate. 'You'll take care of it, won't you?' he said. 'It took me a long time to make.' The thing was, as his mother had said, a fearsome object. Grant thought that it was rather like something for a woman's hat; but he was aware that he was being singled out among men as the sole recipient worthy of such an honour and he accepted it with due gratification. He put it safely away in his own case and hoped that Pat would not supervise his efforts to the extent of making him use it. But each time he chose a new fly in the days that followed, he caught sight of the fearsome object and was warmed by his small cousin's approval of him.

He spent his days by the Turlie; happy and relaxed above the brown swirling water. The water was clear as beer and its foam frothwhite; it filled his ears with music and his days with delight. The damp soft air smurred his tweed with fine dew and the hazel twigs dripped down the back of his neck.

For nearly a week he thought fish, talked fish, and ate fish.

And then, one evening, on his pet pool below the swing bridge, he was startled out of his complacence.

He saw a man's face in the water.

There was time for his heart to come up into his mouth before he realised that the face was not under the surface of the water but at the back of his eyes. It was the dead white face with the reckless eyebrows.

He swore, and sent his Jock Scott singing viciously to the far side of the pool. He was finished with B Seven. He had grown interested in B Seven under a complete misunderstanding of the situation. He had thought that B Seven too had been hounded by demons. He had built up for himself an entirely fallacious picture of B Seven. That toper's Paradise in B Seven's compartment boiled down to an overturned whisky bottle. He was no longer interested in B Seven: a very ordinary young man, bursting with rude health to the point of toughness, who had had one over the eight on a night journey and ended his life in the highly undignified manner of falling backwards and then crawling about on his hands and knees until he stopped breathing.

'But he wrote those line about Paradise,' a voice in him said.

'He didn't,' he said to the voice. 'There's not the slightest evidence that he did any such thing.'

'There's his face. No ordinary face. It was the face that you first succumbed to. Long before you began to think of his Paradise at all.'

'I have not succumbed,' he said. 'In my job you take an automatic interest in people.'

'Yes? You mean, if the occupant of that whisky-sodden compartment had been a fat commercial traveller with a moustache like a badly kept hedge and a face like a boiled pudding, you would still have been interested?'

'I might.'

'You lying dishonest bastard. You were B Seven's champion the minute you saw his face and noticed the way that Yughourt was mauling him about. You snatched him from Yughourt's grip and straightened his jacket like a mother pulling a shawl over her baby.'

'Shut up.'

'You wanted to know about him not because you thought there was anything odd about his death but because, quite simply, you wanted to know about him. He was young and dead, and he had been reckless and alive. You wanted to know what he had been like when he was reckless and alive.'

'All right, I wanted to know. I also want to know who is going to ride the Lincolnshire favourite, and what my shares are quoted at in today's market, and what June Kaye's next picture is going to be; but I'm not losing any sleep about any of them.'

'No; and you don't see June Kaye's face between you and the water, either.'

'I have no intention of seeing anyone's face between me and the river. *Nothing* is going to come between me and the river. I came here to fish and nothing is going to muck up that for me.'

'B Seven came North to do something too. I wonder what it was?'

'How should I know?'

'It couldn't be fishing, anyhow.'

'Why couldn't it?'

'No one who was going five or six hundred miles to fish would be without tackle of some kind. If he was as keen as that he would at least have his own pet lures with him, even if he was going to be lent a rod.'

'Yes.'

'Perhaps his Paradise was Tir nan Og. You know: the Gaelic one. That would fit.'

'How would it fit?'

'Tir nan Og is supposed to be away out to the west, beyond the outermost islands. The Land of the Young. The land of eternal youth, that's the Gaelic Paradise. And what "guards the way" to it? Islands with singing sands, it seems. Islands with stones that stand up like men walking.'

'And beasts that talk? Do you find them too in the Outer Isles?'

'You do.'

'You do? What are they?'

'Seals.'

'Oh, go away and leave me alone. I'm busy. I'm fishing.'

'You may be fishing, but you're not catching a damned thing. Your Jock Scott might as well be stuck in your hat. Now you listen to me'

'I will *not* listen to you. All *right*, there are singing sands in the Islands! All *right*, there are walking stones! *All right*, there are gabby seals! It has nothing to do with me. And I don't suppose it had anything to do with B Seven.'

'No? What was he going North for?'

'To bury a relation, to sleep with a woman, to climb a rock! How should I know? And why should I care?'

'He was going to stay at a Caledonian Hotel somewhere.'

'He was not

'How do you know where he was going to stay?'

'I don't. Nobody does.'

'Why should one of them be all facetious about "robbing the Caley" if he was going to stay at a Waverley?'

'If he was going to Cladda—and I'll bet there's no inn on Cladda called anything as reeking of the mainland as the Caledonian—if he was going to Cladda he would have gone via Glasgow and Oban.'

'Not necessarily. It's just as short and just as comfortable via Scoone. He probably loathed Glasgow. A lot of people do. Why not ring up the Caledonian in Scoone when you go back to the house tonight and find out if a Charles Martin was expected there?'

'I shall do no such thing.'

'If you slap the water like that you'll frighten every fish in the river.'

He went back to the house at supper time in a very bad mood. He had caught nothing and had lost his peace.

And in the somnolent hush that filled the sitting-room when work was over for the day and the children in bed, he caught his eye wandering from his book to the telephone at the other end of the room. It stood on Tommy's desk, provocative in its suggestion of latent power, in the infinite promise of its silent presence. He had only to lift that receiver and he could speak to a man on the Pacific coast of America, he could speak to a man in the wastes of the Atlantic Ocean, he could speak to a man two miles above the earth.

He could speak to a man in the Caledonian Hotel in Scoone.

He resisted this thought, with growing annoyance, for an hour. Then Laura went to get bed-time drinks, and Tommy went to let the dogs out, and Grant reached the telephone in a dive that was nearer a rugby tackle than any civilised method of crossing a room.

He had lifted the receiver before he realised that he did not know the number. He put the receiver back in its cradle and felt that he had been saved. He turned to go back to his book but picked up the telephone book instead. He would have no peace until he had talked to the Caledonian in Scoone; it was cheap enough to have peace at the cost of being a little silly.

'Scoone 1460....Caledonian Hotel? Can you tell me: did a Mr Charles Martin book accommodation with you any time in the last fortnight?...Yes, thank you, I'll wait....No? No one of that name...Oh...Thank you very much. So sorry to have bothered you.'

And that was that, he thought, slamming the receiver down. That, as far as he was concerned, was definitely the end of B Seven.

He drank his nice soothing bed-time drink, and went to bed, and lay wide awake staring at the ceiling. He put the light out, and resorted to his own cure for insomnia: pretending to himself that he had to stay awake. He had evolved this long ago from the simple premise that human nature wants to do the thing it is forbidden to do. And so far it had never failed him. He had only to begin pretending that he was not allowed to go to sleep for his eyelids to droop. The pretence eliminated in one move the greatest barrier to sleep: the fear that one is not going to; and so left the beach clear for the invading tide.

Tonight his eyelids dropped as usual, but a jingle ran round and round in his head like a rat in a cage:

The beasts that talk,

The streams that stand,

The stones that walk,

The singing sand...

What were the streams that stand? Was there something in the Islands that corresponded to that?

Not frozen streams. There was little snow or frost in the Islands. Then, what? Streams that ran into the sand and stood still? No. Fanciful. Streams that stand. Streams that stand?

Perhaps a librarian might know. There must be a goodish Public Library in Scoone.

'I thought you weren't interested any more?' said the voice.

'You go to hell.'

A mechanic, he was. What did that mean? *Mechanicien*. It involved an endless range of possibilities.

Whatever he did, he was successful enough to be able to travel First Class on a British railway. Which in these days made one practically a millionaire. And he had spent all that money on what, to judge by his overnight case, was a flying visit.

A girl, perhaps? The girl who had promised to wait?

But she had been French.

A woman? No Englishman would go five hundred miles for a woman, but a Frenchman might. Especially a Frenchman who had knifed his girl for letting her glance stray.

The beasts that talk

The streams that stand...

Oh, God! not again. Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet eating her curds and whey. Hickory dickory dock. Simple Simon met a pieman going to the fair, said Simple Simon to the pieman Let me taste your ware. Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross—Your imagination had to be caught before you were fired by the need to write down a thing. You could, if your imagination was vivid, get to a stage when you were in bondage to an idea. When it became an *idée fixe*. You could become so enraptured by the pictured grace of a temple's flight of steps that you would work for years to earn the money and gain the leisure to take you there. In extreme cases it became a compulsion, and you dropped everything and went to the thing that had seduced you: a mountain, a green stone head in a museum, an uncharted river, a bit of sail-cloth.

How far had B Seven's vision ridden him? Enough to send him searching? Or just enough to make him write it down?

Because he *had* written those pencilled words.

Of course he had written them.

They belonged to B Seven as much as his eyebrows did. As much as those schoolboy capital letters did.

'Those *English* capital letters?' said the voice, provocative.

'Yes, those English letters.'

- 'But he was a native of Marseilles.'
- 'He could have been educated in England, couldn't he?'
- 'In two shakes you'll be telling me that he wasn't a Frenchman at all.'
- 'In two shakes I will.'

But that, of course, was to enter the realm of fantasy. There was no mystery about B Seven. He had an identity, a home and people, a girl who was waiting for him. He was demonstrably a Frenchman, and the fact that he wrote English verse in English handwriting was entirely by the way.

'He probably went to school in Clapham,' he said nastily to the voice; and fell instantly asleep.

In the morning he woke with rheumatism in his right shoulder. He lay considering this in slow amusement. There was no end to what your subconscious and your body could achieve between them. They would provide you with any alibi you wanted. A perfectly good honest alibi. He had known husbands who developed high temperatures and the symptoms of 'flu each time their wives were on the point of departure to visit relations. He had known women who were so tough that they could watch a razor fight unmoved and yet would pass out in the deadest of dead faints when asked an awkward question. ('Was the accused so persecuted by police cross-examination that she was unconscious for fifteen minutes?' 'She fainted, certainly.' 'There was no question of a simulated faint, was there? The doctor says that he saw her at the material time and there was great difficulty in reviving her. And that collapse was a direct result of the police cross-examination to which she was being—' etc.) Oh, yes. There was no limit to what your subconscious and your body could cook up together. And today they had cooked up something that would keep him off the river. His subconscious had wanted to go in to Scoone today and talk to the librarian at the Public Library. His subconscious had remembered, moreover, that it was market day and Tommy would be taking the car into Scoone. So his subconscious had set to work on the eternally sycophantic body and between them they had made a tired shoulder muscle into an unworkable joint.

Very neat.

He got up and dressed, wincing each time he lifted an arm, and went down to cadge a lift from Tommy. Tommy was heart-broken at his disablement but delighted by his company, and they were so gay together, this warm spring morning, and Grant was so filled with the pleasure that ferreting out information always provided for him, that they were running through the outer suburbs of Scoone before he remembered that he was in a car. That he was shut into a car.

He was enormously gratified.

He promised to meet Tommy for lunch at the Caledonian, and went away to find the Public Library. But before he had gone far a new idea struck him. The *Flying Highlander* would have come clicking over the points at Scoone only a few hours ago. Every twenty-four hours from year's end to year's end the *Flying Highlander* made that night journey and came into Scoone in the morning. And since the train crews habitually stuck to the same run, alternating time on and time off, there was just the chance that one of the staff who had come into Scoone on the *Flying Highlander* this morning was Murdo Gallacher.

So he changed direction and went to the station instead.

'Were you on duty when the London mail arrived this morning?' he asked a porter.

'No, but Lachie was,' said the porter. He stretched his mouth into a line, let out a whistle that would have done credit to an engine, tilted his head back an inch to summon a distant colleague, and went back to reading the racing page of the *Clarion*.

Grant went to meet the slowly advancing Lachie and asked him the same question.

Yes, Lachie had been on duty.

'Can you tell me if Murdo Gallacher was one of the sleeping-car attendants?'

Lachie said that yes, Old Sourpuss was on her.

Could Lachie say where Old Sourpuss could be found now?

Lachie glanced up at the station clock. It was after eleven.

Yes, Lachie could say where he would be. He would be in the Eagle Bar waiting for someone to stand him a drink.

So to the Eagle Bar at the back of Scoone Station Grant went, and found that Lachie had been, in the main, right. Yughourt was indeed there, mooning over a half pint. Grant ordered a whisky for himself and saw Yughourt's ears prick.

'Good-morning,' he said amiably to Yughourt. 'I've had some very good fishing since I saw you last.' And was pleased to notice the hope grow on Yughourt's face.

'I'm glad of that, sir, very glad,' he said, pretending to remember Grant. 'The Tay, is it?'

'No, the Turlie. By the way, what did your dead young man die of? The one I left you trying to waken.' Antagonism began to wither the eagerness on Yughourt's face. 'Won't you join me?' Grant added. 'A whisky?' Yughourt relaxed.

After that it was easy. Yughourt was still prickled with resentment at the inconvenience that he had been caused. He had even had to attend the inquest in his spare time. It was, Grant thought, as easy as dealing with a toddler who has just learned to run. It needed only a touch to steer him in any required direction.

Yughourt had not only hated having to attend the inquest, he had hated the inquest and he had hated every single soul connected with the inquest. Between his hatred and two double whiskies he provided Grant with the most detailed account of everyone and everything. He was the best value for money that Grant had ever had. He had been 'on' in the affair from first to last; from the first appearance of B Seven at Euston to the coroner's verdict. As a source of information he was pure horse's-mouth, and he 'gave' like a beer tap.

'Had he travelled with you before?' Grant asked.

No, Yughourt had never seen him before and was glad that he was never going to again.

This was where Grant's satisfaction suddenly changed to satiation. One more half-minute of Yughourt and he would be sick. He pushed himself off the counter of the Eagle bar and went to look for the Public Library.

The library was frightful beyond description: a monstrosity in liver-coloured stone; but after Yughourt it seemed the fine flower of civilisation. The assistants were charming and the librarian was a thin little piece of faded elegance with a tie no broader than the black silk ribbon of his eyeglasses. As an antidote to too much Murdo Gallacher it could not have been better.

Little Mr Tallisker was a Scot from Orkney—which, he pointed out, was not being a Scot at all—and he was both interested in and knowledgeable about the Islands. He knew all about the singing sands on Cladda. There were other alleged singing sands, too (every

Island wanted to have what its neighbours had as soon as they heard about any new possession, whether it was a pier or a legend), but the Cladda ones were the original. They lay, like most of the Island sands, on the Atlantic side, facing the unbroken ocean. Looking out to Tir nan Og. Which, as Mr Grant might know, was the Gaelic heaven. The land of the eternally young. It was interesting, wasn't it, how each people evolved their own idea of Heaven? One as a feast of lovely women, one as forgetfulness, one as continuous music and no work, one as good hunting grounds. The Gaels, Mr Tallisker thought, had had the loveliest idea. The land of youth.

What sang? Grant asked, interrupting the dissection of comparative bliss.

It was a moot point, Mr Tallisker said. Indeed, you could have it either way. He had walked them himself. Endless miles of pure white sand by a brilliant sea. They did 'sing' as one trod on them, but he himself held that 'squeak' would be a better description. On the other hand on any day that provided a steady wind—and such days were of no unusual occurrence in the Islands—the fine, almost invisible, surface sand was swept along the wide beaches so that they did in fact 'sing'.

From sand Grant led him to seals (the Islands were full of seal stories, it seemed; the translation of seals into men and vice versa; if they were to be believed half the population of the Islands had some seal blood in them) and from seals to walking stones, and on all Mr Tallisker was interesting and informative. But on streams he fell down. Streams seemed to be the only things on Cladda that were exactly like their counterpart anywhere else. Except that they too often spread into little lochs or lost themselves in bog, the streams of Cladda were just streams; water in the process of finding its own level.

Well, thought Grant, going away to meet Tommy for lunch, that in a way was 'standing'. Running into standing water; into bog. B Seven might have used the word because he needed the rhyme. He had wanted something to rhyme with sand.

He listened with only half an ear to the talk of the two fellow sheep-farmers that Tommy brought to lunch, and envied them their untroubled eyes and their air of unlimited leisure. Nothing hounded these large $rang\acute{e}$ creatures. Their flocks were decimated every now and then by strokes of fate; great snowstorms or swift disease. But they themselves stayed quiet and sane, like the hills that bred them. Big slow men, full of little jokes and pleased with small things. Grant was very conscious that his obsession with B Seven was an unreasonable thing; abnormal; that it was part of his illness. That in his sober mind he would not have thought a second time about B Seven. He resented his obsession and clung to it. It was at once his bane and his refuge.

But he drove home with Tommy even more cheerful than when he had set out. There was practically nothing about the inquest on Charles Martin, French mechanic, that he did not now know. He was that much to the good. And that was a lot.

After supper that night he discarded the book on European politics which had shared with Tommy's telephone his interest on the previous evening and went hunting along the bookshelves for something about the Islands.

'Are you looking for anything in particular, Alan?' Laura asked, looking up from *The Times*.

'I'm looking for something about the Islands.'

'The Hebrides?'

'Yes. I suppose there is a book about them.'

'Hahl' said Laura, mock amused. 'Is there a book about them! There's a whole literature, my dear. It's a distinction in Scotland not to have written a book about the Islands.'

'Have you any of them?'

'We have practically all of them. Everyone who has ever come to stay here has brought one.'

'Why didn't they take them away with them?'

'You'll see why when you have a taste of them. You'll find them on the bottom shelf. A whole row of them.'

He began to go through the row, gutting the books with a swift practised eye.

'Why this sudden interest in the Hebrides?' Laura asked.

'Those singing sands that Wee Archie talked about stuck in my mind.'

'That must be the first time Wee Archie has ever said anything that stuck in someone's mind.'

'I expect his mother remembers his first word,' Tommy put in from behind the *Clarion*.

'It seems that Tir nan Og is just one jump west from the singing sands.'

'So is America,' said Laura. 'Which is much nearer the Islanders' idea of Heaven than Tir nan Og is.'

Grant, repeating Mr Tallisker's speech on comparative heavens, said that the Gaels were the only race who visualised Heaven as a country of the young; which was endearing of them.

'They are the only known race who have no word for no,' Laura said drily. 'That is a much more revealing characteristic than their notions of eternity.'

Grant came back to the fire with an armful of books and began to go through them at leisure.

'It is difficult to imagine a mind that has never evolved a word for no, isn't it?' Laura said musingly, and went back to The Times.

The books varied from the scientific, through the sentimental, to the purely fantastic. From kelp-burning to the saints and heroes. From bird-watching to soul's pilgrimages. They varied, too, from the admirable but dull to the unbelievably bad. It seemed that no one who had ever visited the Islands had refrained from writing about them. The bibliographies at the end of the soberer books would have done justice to the Roman Empire. On one thing all were agreed, however: the Islands were magic. The Islands were the last refuge of civilisation in a world gone mad. The Islands were beautiful beyond imagining; a world carpeted with wild flowers and bounded by a sea that broke in sapphire on silver beaches. A land of brilliant sunlight; of good-looking people and heart-searching music. Wild, lovely music handed down from the beginning of time, from an age when the gods were young. And if you wanted to go there, see MacBrayne's time-table on Page 3 of the Appendix.

The books lasted Grant very happily until bed-time. And while they drank their nightcaps he said: 'I'd like to have a look at the Islands'

'Make a plan for next year,' Tommy said, agreeing. 'There's quite good fishing on Lewis.'

'No, I mean now.'

'Go now!' Laura said. 'I never heard anything so daft.'

'Why? I can't fish until my shoulder is better, so I might as well go exploring.'

'Your shoulder will be better in two days with my treatment.'

'How does one get to Cladda?'

'From Oban, I should think,' Tommy said.

'Alan Grant, don't be absurd. If you can't fish for a day or two there are a hundred other things you can do instead of being bucketed about on a Minch crossing in March.'

'Spring comes early to the Islands, they say.'

'It doesn't to the Minch, believe me.'

'You could fly, of course,' Tommy said, considering the subject as he considered everything that was put in front of him, with a kind sobriety. 'You could fly one day and come back the next, if you liked. It's quite a good service.'

There was a little silence while Grant met his cousin's eye. She knew that he could not fly; and why.

'Give it up, Alan,' she said, in a kinder tone. 'There are much nicer things to do than being stood on one's head in the middle of the Minch in March. If you just want to get away from Clune for a bit why don't you hire a car—there's a very good garage in Scoone—and go exploring on the mainland for a week or so? Now that the weather is soft it will be getting green in the West.'

'It isn't that I want to get away from Clune. Quite the contrary. If I could take Clune *en bloc* with me I would. It is just that I have got bitten with the idea of those sands.'

He saw Laura begin to consider the idea from a new angle, and he could follow her thought quite well. If this was what his sick mind wanted, then it would be wrong to try to dissuade him. The interest of a place he had never seen before should be an ideal counteraction to self-conscious brooding.

'Oh, well, what you want is a Bradshaw, I suppose. We do have one, but it's mostly used as a door-stop or a step for the top bookshelf, so it's a little out of date.'

'As far as the services to the Outer Islands are concerned, it won't matter what the date of it is,' said Tommy. 'The Laws of the Medes and the Persians are not more unchangeable than MacBrayne's schedules. As someone has remarked, they don't exactly encroach on eternity but they very nearly outlast time.'

So Grant found the Bradshaw and took it to bed with him.

And in the morning he borrowed a small case from Tommy, and packed into it the bare necessities of existence for a week or so. He had always had a passion for travelling light, and it always pleased him to be getting away by himself, even from people he loved (a trait that had done much to keep him single) and he caught himself whistling under his breath as he put the few things into the small space. He had not whistled to himself since the shadow of unreason had reached out and taken the sunlight from him.

He was going to be foot-loose again; foot-loose. It was a beautiful thought.

Laura had promised to drive him into Scoone in time to catch the train to Oban, but Graham was late in coming back with the car from Moymore village, so that it was touch-and-go whether he caught the train at all. They made it with thirty seconds to spare, and a breathless Laura pushed a bundle of papers into the open window as the train pulled out, and gasped: 'Enjoy yourself, my dear. Seasickness does wonders for the liver.'

He sat, alone in the compartment, in a daze of contentment with the magazines unheeded on the seat beside him. He watched the bare empty landscape trundle by and grow slowly greener as they went west. He had no idea why he was going to Cladda. It was certainly not to gather information in the police sense. He was going—to find B Seven. That is as near as it could be put into words. He wanted to go and see this place which so nearly reproduced the landscape of the poem. He wondered, sunk in sleepy bliss, whether B Seven had ever talked to anyone about his Paradise. He remembered the writing and thought not. Those tightly arcaded M's and N's were too defensive to have been made by a talker. In any case, it didn't matter how many people he had talked to about the thing, since there was no way of making contact with them. He could hardly put an advertisement in the papers saying: Read this poem and tell me if you recognise it.

Or-why couldn't he?

His sleepiness fell from him while he considered this new angle.

He considered it all the way to Oban.

In Oban he went to a hotel, ordered a self-congratulatory drink, and while he consumed it he wrote to each of the London daily papers enclosing a cheque and asking them to print an identical notice in their personal column. The notice said:

'The beasts that talk, the streams that stand, the stones that walk, the singing sand....Anyone recognising please communicate with A. Grant, c/o P.O., Moymore, Comrieshire.'

The only daily papers to which he did not send this appeal were the *Clarion* and *The Times*. He did not want Clune to think that he had taken leave of his senses altogether.

As he made his way along the front to the cockleshell in which he was due to brave the Minch, he thought: 'It will serve me right if someone writes to say that the thing is one of the best-known lines of some Xanadu concoction of Coleridge's, and that I must be illiterate not to have known it!'

The wallpaper consisted of far too heavy roses hanging from a far too slender trellis-work, and the insecure character of the whole thing was increased by the fact that the paper not only hung away from the wall but moved about in the draught. It was not readily obvious where the draught came from because the small window was not only tightly shut but had patently been tightly shut since its manufacture and original insertion in the house structure about the beginning of the century. The little swing mirror on the chest of drawers lived up to its promise in the first respect but not in the second. It would swing with ease amounting to abandon through the whole circle of three hundred and sixty degrees; but it did not reflect anything to any noticeable degree. A last year's cardboard calendar folded in four kept its gyratory talents in check, but nothing of course could be done to increase its powers of reflection.

Two of the four drawers in the chest were capable of being opened. The third would not open because it had lost its knob, and the fourth because it had lost the will. Above the black iron fireplace with its frill of red crinkled paper brown with age was an engraving of a partially clothed Venus comforting a quite unclothed Cupid. If the cold had not already eaten into his bones Grant thought that this picture would have finished the process.

He looked from the little window down on the small harbour with its collection of fishing-boats, at the grey sea slapping drearily against the breakwater, and the grey rain beating on the cobbles, and thought of the log fire in the sitting-room at Clune. He toyed with the idea of going to bed as the quickest way of getting warm, but a second glance at the bed dissuaded him. Its plate-like thinness was made even more plate-like by the meagre covering of a white honeycomb cotton cover. At the foot, a turkey-red cotton quilt suitable for a doll's perambulator was folded into an elaborate pattern. Above it brooded the finest collection of unmatching brass knobs that it had ever been Grant's fortune to meet.

Cladda Hotel. The gateway to Tir nan Og.

He went downstairs and poked the smoky fire in the sitting-room. Someone had banked up the fire with the potato peelings from lunch, so his efforts were not very successful. Rage came to his rescue and he rang the bell with all his might. The wires jangled in a crazy dance somewhere in the walls but no bell rang. He went out into the lobby where the wind was coming soughing in under the front door and shouted. Never, even in his best form on the 'square', had he used his voice with so passionate a determination to produce results. A young female creature came from the back regions and stared at him. She had a face like a rather practical Madonna and legs the same length as her body.

'Wis yu bawling?' she asked.

'No, I wasn't bawling. That sound you heard was my teeth chattering. In my country a sitting-room fire is designed to give out heat not to consume refuse.'

She looked at him a little longer as if translating his speech into a more understandable idiom, and then moved past him to look at the fire.

'Oh Dé,' she said, 'that will never do. Stop you and I'll get you a bit of fire.'

She went away and came back with what seemed to be most of the kitchen fire blazing on a shovel. Before he could remove some of the packed dross and vegetable matter from the grate she had dumped the flaming mass on top of all.

'I'll be getting some tea to warm you,' she said. 'Mr Todd is down at the pier seeing did the things come on the boat. He'll be back in no time at all.'

She said it comfortingly, as if the presence of the proprietor would automatically be warming. Grant took it for granted that she was apologising for the absence of an official welcome to a guest.

He sat and watched the kitchen fire gradually lose heart as it became conscious of the bed of potato peelings on which it had been cast away. He did his best to rake out some of the damp black mass from underneath so as to provide an encouraging draught, but the thing merely settled down in a sad heap. He watched the glow fade until only little red worms of incandescence ran to and fro across the surface of the blackened coals as the passing wind sucked the air from the room into the chimney. He thought of putting on his waterproof and walking in the rain; walking in the rain could be a delightful thing. But the thought of hot tea held him where he was.

After nearly an hour of firewatching, no tea had come. But 'N. Todd, Prop.' came back from the harbour, accompanied by a boy in a navy-blue jersey pushing a wheelbarrow laden with large cardboard cartons, and came in to welcome his guest. They did not expect guests at this time of the year, he said; he thought when he had seen him come off the boat that he would be staying with someone on the island. Gathering songs, or something.

There was something in the way he said 'gathering songs'—a detached tone bordering on comment—that made Grant sure that he was no native

No, said Mr Todd, when asked, he did not belong to the place. He had had a good little commercial hotel in the Lowlands, but this was more to his taste. And, seeing the surprise on his guest's face he added: 'To tell you the truth, Mr Grant, I was tired of counterrappers. You know: the kind of chap who can't wait a minute. Out here no one ever thinks of rapping on a counter. Today, tomorrow, or next week is all the same to an Islander. It's a bit maddening now and then, when you want something done, but for most of the time it's fine and restful. My blood pressure's away down.' He noticed the fire. 'That's a poor sort of fire Katie-Ann's given you. You'd better come ben to my office and warm yourself.'

At this moment Katie-Ann put her head in at the door and said that it had taken all this time to boil the kettle because the kitchen fire had gone out on her, and would Mr Grant now think it a good thing to have his tea and his high-tea at one and the same time. Grant did indeed think it a good thing, and as she went away to prepare this evening repast he asked his host for a drink.

'The magistrates took away the licence from my predecessor, and I haven't yet got it back. I'll get it back at the next Licensing

Court. So I can't sell you a drink. There isn't a licence on the island. But if you'll come ben to my office I'll be glad to stand you a whisky.'

The office was a tiny place, tropical in its breathless heat. Grant savoured the oven atmosphere gratefully, and drank the bad whisky neat, as it was proffered. He took the indicated chair and stretched out his feet to the blaze.

'You're not an authority on the island, then,' he said.

Mr Todd grinned. 'In one way I am,' he said wickedly. 'But probably not the way you mean it.'

'To whom should I go to learn about the place?'

'Well, there's two authorities. Father Heslop and the Reverend Mr MacKay. On the whole perhaps Father Heslop would be better.'

'You think he is the more knowledgeable?'

'No; they're about fifty-fifty as far as that goes. But two-thirds of the islanders are R.C. If you go to the priest you'll only have a third of the population against you, instead of two-thirds. Of course the Presbyterian third are much nastier customers to be up against, but if numbers count with you then you'd better see Father Heslop. Better see Father Heslop anyway. I'm a heathen myself so I'm an outcast from both flocks, but Father Heslop is for a Licence and Mr MacKay dead against it.' He grinned again and refilled Grant's glass.

'I take it the priest would rather see the stuff sold openly than drunk on the sly.'

'That's it.'

'Did you ever have a visitor called Charles Martin staying here?'

'Martin? No. Not in my time. But if you'd like to look through the visitors' book it's on the table in the lobby.'

'If a visitor doesn't stay at the hotel where would he be likely to stay? In rooms?'

'No, no one lets rooms on the island. The houses are too small for that. They'd stay either with Father Heslop or at the manse.'

By the time that Katie-Ann came to say that his tea was waiting on him in the sitting-room the blood was flowing freely again through Grant's once-moribund body and he was hungry. He looked forward to his first meal in this 'tiny oasis of civilisation in a barbarous world' (see *Dream Islands* by H. G. F. Pynche-Maxwell, Beal and Batter, 15/6). He rather hoped that it might not be either salmon or sea-trout, having had an elegant sufficiency of both in the last eight or nine days. He would not turn up his nose at a piece of grilled sea-trout if it happened to be that. Grilled with some local butter. But he hoped for lobster—the island was famous for its lobsters—and failing that some herring fresh from the sea, split, and fried after being dipped in oatmeal.

His first meal in the isles of delight consisted of a couple of bright orange kippers inadequately cured and liberally dyed in Aberdeen, bread made in Glasgow, oatcakes baked by a factory in Edinburgh and never toasted since, jam manufactured in Dundee, and butter made in Canada. The only local produce was a pallid, haggis-shaped mound of crowdie; a white crumbly by-product without smell or taste.

The sitting-room in unshaded lamplight was even less appetising than it had been in the grey light of afternoon, and Grant fled to his freezing little bedroom. He demanded two hot-water bottles and suggested to Katie-Ann that since he was the sole guest she should filch the quilts from every other bedroom in the house and dedicate them to his use. She did this with all her native Celt pleasure in the irregular, heaping his bed with borrowed luxury and suffocating with giggles.

He lay under the five meagre bits of wadding, topped off with his own coat and Burberry, and pretended that the whole thing was one good English eiderdown. As he grew warm he became conscious of the cold stuffiness of the room. This was the last straw and quite suddenly he began to laugh. He lay there and laughed as he had not laughed for nearly a year. Laughed till the tears came, laughed until he was so exhausted that he could no more, and lay spent and purged and happy under his fine variety of bedclothes.

Laughter must do untold things for one's endocrine glands, he thought, feeling the well-being flood through him in a life-giving tide. More especially, perhaps, when it is laughter at oneself. At the fine glorious absurdity of oneself in relation to the world. To set out for the threshold of Tir nan Og and fetch up at the Cladda Hotel had an exquisite ridiculousness. If the Islands provided him with nothing but this he would consider himself well rewarded.

He ceased to care that the room was airless and the covers insecure. He lay looking at the rose-heavy wallpaper and wished that he could show it to Laura. He remembered that he had not yet been transferred into that newly-decorated bedroom at Clune which, up till now, had always been his. Was Laura expecting another visitor? Was it possible that her latest candidate for his affections was to be housed under the same roof? So far he had been happily free of female society; the evenings at Clune had been family evenings, peaceful and long-breathing. Had Laura been merely holding her hand until he was, so to speak, able to sit up and take notice? She had been suspiciously regretful that he was going to miss the opening of the new hall at Moymore. A ceremony that she would have in her normal mind not expected him to attend at all. Had she expected a guest for the opening? The bedroom could not be meant for Lady Kentallen, because she would come over from Angus and go back the same afternoon. Then for whom was that bedroom redecorated and kept empty?

He was still turning the small question over in his mind when he fell asleep. And it was only in the morning that it occurred to him that he had hated the closed window because it made the room stuffy and not because it was closed.

He washed in the two pints of tepid water that Katie-Ann brought him and went downstairs rejoicing. He felt on top of the world. He ate the Glasgow bread, still another day older this morning, and the Edinburgh oatcakes, and the Dundee jam, and the Canadian butter, together with some sausages from the English midlands, and enjoyed them. Having given up his expectation of primitive elegance, he was prepared to accept primitive existence.

He was gratified to find that in spite of cold wind and wet weather and thinly covered hard beds his rheumatism had entirely gone, being no longer needed by his subconscious to provide an alibi. The wind was still howling in the chimney and the water spouting up from the breakwater, but the rain had stopped. He put on his Burberry and tacked round the harbour front to the shop. There were only two places of business in the row of houses that fringed the harbour: a post-office and a provision merchant. These two between them supplied the island with all that it needed. The post-office was also a newsagent; and the provision merchant was a combination of grocer, ironmonger, chemist, draper, shoe-shop, tobacconist, china-merchant, and ship's chandler. Bolts of sprigged cotton for curtains

or dresses lay on shelves alongside the biscuit tins, and hams hung from the roof among strings of locknit undergarments. Today, Grant noticed, there was also a large wooden tray of tuppenny buns baked, if the paper round the queen cakes was to be believed, in Oban. They were crummy and depressed-looking, as if they had been tumbled about in one of the cardboard cartons that were such an indispensable part of island life, and they smelled very faintly of paraffin, but he supposed that they made a change from the Glasgow bread.

In the shop were several men from the fishing-boats in the harbour and a little round man in a black raincoat who could be nothing but a priest. This was a fortunate thing. Even the Presbyterian third, he felt, could hardly hold against him a fortuitous meeting in a public store. He edged in beside His Reverence and waited with him while the fishermen were being served. After that it was plain sailing. The priest 'picked him up' and he had five witnesses to it. Moreover, Father Heslop deftly included the proprietor, one Duncan Tavish, in the conversation, and, from the fact that Father Heslop called him Mr Tavish and not Duncan, Grant deduced that the proprietor was not one of his flock. So he was very happily parcelled out among the islanders over the paraffiny buns and the margarine, and there would be no internecine war over the possession of his person.

He went out into the gale with Father Heslop and strolled home with him. Or rather they beat up against the wind together, staggering a few steps forward at a time, and shouting remarks to each other above the noise of their flapping garments. Grant had the advantage of his companion in that he wore no hat, but Father Heslop was not only lower on the ground but had a figure ideally streamlined for life in a gale. He had no angles anywhere.

It was good to go in from the blast to a warm turf fire and silence.

'Morag!' called Father Heslop, into the further end of the house, 'Some tea for me and my friend here. And a scone maybe, like a good girl.'

But Morag had not baked, any more than Katie-Ann had. They were given Marie biscuits, a little soft in the island dampness. But the tea was wonderful.

Because he knew that he was an object of curiosity to Father Heslop, as he was to everyone on the island, he said that he had been fishing with relations in Scotland, but had to stop owing to a bad shoulder. And because he had been bitten with the idea of the Islands, and more especially with the Singing Sands on Cladda, he had taken the chance of coming to see them; a chance he might never have presented to him again. He supposed that Father Heslop was well acquainted with the sands?

Oh, yes, of course Father Heslop knew the sands. He had been fifteen years on the island. They were on the west side of the island, facing the Atlantic. It was no distance across the island. Grant could walk there this afternoon.

'I would rather wait for fine weather. It would be better to see them in sunlight, wouldn't it?'

'At this time of year you might wait for weeks before you'd see them in sunlight.'

'I thought spring came early to the Islands?'

'Oh, I think, myself, that's just an idea of the people who write books about them. This is my sixteenth spring on Cladda, and I have yet to catch one here before its time. The spring's an Islander too,' he added with a little smile.

They talked of the weather, the winter gales (which made today, according to Father Heslop, a thing of zephyrs), the penetrating damp, the occasionally idyllic summer days.

Why had a place of so few attractions captured the imagination of so many people, Grant wanted to know.

Well, partly it was that they saw it only at high summer, and partly it was that those who came and were disappointed, were reluctant to admit their disappointment either to themselves or the friends they had left behind. They compensated themselves by talking big. But it was Father Heslop's own theory that most people who came were unconsciously running away from life, and they found what their imaginations prepared for them. Through their eyes the Islands were beautiful.

Grant thought this over, and then asked him if he had ever known a Charles Martin, who had been interested in singing sands.

No; Father Heslop had never met a Charles Martin, as far as he could remember. Had he come to Cladda?

Grant did not know.

He went out into the blast, and was blown back to the hotel at an undignified trot, teetering on his toes like an elderly toper. The bare lobby at the hotel smelled of unidentifiable hot food and sang like a choir as the wind came shrieking in under the outside door. But they had managed a fire that looked like a fire, in the sitting-room. To the scream of wind in the passage and the yowling of wind in the chimney he ate beef from South America, carrots tinned in Lincolnshire, potatoes grown in Moray, milk pudding packaged in North London, and fruit bottled in the Vale of Evesham. Now that he was no longer conditioned to magic, he filled his stomach thankfully with what was put in front of him. If Cladda had denied him spiritual joy it had provided him with a fine physical appetite.

'Don't you ever bake scones, Katie-Ann?' he said, when he was arranging the time of his high tea.

'Is it scones you'll be wanting?' she said surprised. 'Indeed, yes, I'll bake you some. But we have baker's cakes for your tea. And biscuits, and ginger-snaps. Would you rather be having scones than them?'

Remembering the 'baker's cakes' Grant said enthusiastically that he would, he would indeed.

'Well, then,' she said kindly, 'of course, I'll bake you a scone.'

For an hour he walked; along a flat grey road through a flat grey desolation. To his right, distant in the mist, was a hill; the only visible height. The whole thing was as inspiring as the fens on a wet January day. Every now and then the wind on his left flank would send him spinning sideways off the road altogether, and he struggled back half amused, half irritated. At long distances, odd cottages lay cowering close to the earth, blind and limpet-like, without any sign of human habitation. Some had stones slung from the roof by ropes to weight the structure against the wind's importunity. None of them had fence, outhouse, garden or bush. It was living at its most primitive; inside four walls; everything under hatches and battened down.

And then, suddenly, the wind smelt salt.

And in less than half an hour he came on it. He came on it without warning, across a great waste of wet green grass that in summertime must be starred with flowers. There had been no visible reason why the long levels of grassy land should not go on for ever to the horizon; it was all part of this flat grey endless world of bog. He had been prepared to go on walking to the horizon; so that he was startled to find that the horizon was ten miles out at sea. There it lay in front of him, the Atlantic; and if it was not beautiful it was,

nevertheless, impressive in its sweep and simplicity. The dirty green water, dirty and ragged, roared on to the beach and broke in a flash of white that was vicious. To right and left, as far as eye could see, were the long lines of breaking water and the pale sands. There was nothing else in all the world but the green torn sea and the sands.

He stood there looking at it, and remembering that the nearest land was America. Not since he had stood in the North African desert had he known that uncanny feeling that is born of unlimited space. That feeling of human diminution.

So sudden had been the presence of the sea, and its rage and extent so overwhelming, that he had hung there motionless for several moments before realising that here were the sands that had brought him to the fringe of the western world in March. These were the singing sands.

Nothing sang today but the wind and the Atlantic. Together they made a Wagnerian tumult that buffeted one almost as physically as did the gale and the spray. The whole world was one mad uproar of grey-green and white and wild noise.

He walked down over the fine white sand to the edge of the water, and let the tumult roar over him. At close quarters it had a senseless quality that dissolved his uncomfortable sense of diminution and made him feel human and superior. He turned his back on it almost contemptuously as one would on a bad-mannered child who was making an exhibition of himself. He felt warm and alive and master of himself; admirably intelligent and gratifyingly sentient. He walked back up the sand, absurdly, and extravagantly glad to be a human being and alive. The air that came off the land when he had turned his back on the salt sterile wind from the sea was gentle and warm. It was like opening the door of a house. He went on across the grassy levels without once looking back. The wind hounded him along the flat bogs, but it was no longer in his face and the salt was no longer in his nostrils. His nostrils were full of the good smell of damp earth; the smell of growing things.

He was happy.

As he came at last down the slope to the harbour he looked up at the hill in the mist and decided that tomorrow he would climb it.

He came back to the hotel ravenous, and was gratified to be given no fewer than two items of local manufacture for his high tea. One was a plate of Katie-Ann's scones, and the other was 'sleeshacks': a delicacy he had known of old. Sleeshacks were mashed potatoes fried in slices; and they certainly helped to make appetising the remains of cold beef from lunch which was the *pièce de résistance* of the meal. But as he ate his first course he kept smelling something more evocative of those early Strathspey days than even sleeshacks could be. An aroma both sharp and subtle it was, floating and circling about his brain in a nostalgic tantalisation. It was not until he had put his knife into one of Katie-Ann's scones that he knew what it was. The scone was yellow with soda and quite uneatable. With a regretful salute to her for the memory (platefuls of yellow soda-laden scones laid out in the farmhouse kitchen table for the farm-hands' tea: Oh, Tir nan Og!) he buried two of Katie-Ann's scones under the glowing coals in the grate and made do with the Glasgow bread.

And that night he fell asleep without looking at the wallpaper and without remembering the closed window at all.

In the morning he ran into the Reverend Mr MacKay in the post-office and felt that he was distributing his favours very successfully. Mr MacKay was on his way down to the harbour to see if the crew of a Swedish fishing-boat that was lying there would like to come to church if they were still there the day after tomorrow. There was also, he understood, a Dutch vessel, that might be presumed to be of a Presbyterian persuasion. If they showed signs of wanting to come he would prepare a sermon in the English for them.

He condoled with Grant about the rough weather. It was early in the year for the Islands, but he supposed that one had to take holidays when one was given them.

'You'll be a schoolmaster, maybe, Mr Grant.'

No, Grant said, he was a Civil Servant. Which was his normal answer to questions about his profession. People were prepared to believe that Civil Servants were human beings; no one ever believed that a policeman was one. They were two-dimensional characters with silver buttons and a notebook.

'You'd be amazed, now, you that has not been here before, if you could see what the Islands are like in June, Mr Grant. Not a cloud in the sky, day after day, and the air so hot that ye'll see it dancing before you. And the mirage as mad as ever it was in the desert.'

'Were you in North Africa?'

Och, yes; Mr MacKay had been in North Africa with the Jocks. 'And believe me, Mr Grant, I've seen odder things from my window up in the manse there than ever I did between Alamein and Tripoli. I've seen the lighthouse on the point there standing up in the air. Yes, halfway up the sky. I've seen the hill there change shape till it looked like a great mushroom. And as for the rocks by the sea, those great pillars of stone, they can turn light and transparent and move about as if they were walking through a set of the Lancers.'

Grant considered this with interest, and ceased to listen to the rest of Mr MacKay's discourse. As he parted from him alongside the *Ann Loefquist* of Goteborg, Mr MacKay hoped that he was coming to the *ceilidh* tonight. All the island would be there and he would hear some fine singing.

When he asked his host about the *ceilidh* and where it was being held, Mr Todd said that it would be the usual mixture of song and talk and end up with the usual dance and that it would be held in the only place on the island suitable for such a gathering—the Peregrine Hall.

'Why Peregrine?'

'That is the name of the lady who gave it. She used to come to the island in the summer and she was all for improving trade and making the islanders self-supporting, so she built a fine long hut with big windows and skylights so that they could weave in company and not be ruining their eyes over looms in tiny dark rooms. They should get together, she said, and have a Cladda mark for their tweed and make it sought-after, like Harris. She could have saved her breath and her bawbees, poor lady. No islander would walk a yard to work. They would rather go blind than move out of their own light. But the hut is very useful for island gatherings. Why don't you have a look in tonight when it gets going?'

Grant said that he would do that, and went away to spend the rest of the day climbing Cladda's solitary hill. There was no mist today although the wind was still moisture-laden, and as he went upward the seas opened under him, scattered with islands and streaked with the tides. Here and there a single line, unnaturally straight in this arrangement of nature, marked the track of a ship. From the top he had the whole Hebridean world at his feet. He sat there and considered it, this barren water-logged universe, and it seemed to him the ultimate in desolation. A world half-emerged from chaos, formless and void. Looking down on Cladda itself it was impossible to tell, so mixed were sea and land, whether one was looking at a land full of lochs or a sea full of islands. It was a place best left to the grey geese and the seals.

He was happy up there, however; watching the changing patterns on the sea floor, violet and grey and green; watching the sea birds soar to inspect him and the flutter of nesting plovers on the low ground. Thinking about Mr MacKay's mirages and the stones that walked. Thinking, as he never ceased for any length of time to think, about B Seven. Here was B Seven's world, according to specification. The singing sands, the talking beasts, the walking stones, the streams that ceased to run. What had B Seven intended to do here? Just to come, as he himself had done, and look?

A flying dash, with an overnight case. That surely portended one of two things: a meeting, or an inspection. Since no one had yet missed him, then it could not have been a rendezvous. Therefore it was an inspection. One could go to inspect many things: a house; a prospect; a painting. But if one was driven to write verse *en route* then the verse was surely a pointer to the subject for inspection.

What had held B Seven in bondage to this bleak world? Had he been reading too many books by H. G. F. Pynche-Maxwell and his like? Had he forgotten that the silver sands and the wild flowers and the sapphire seas were strictly seasonal?

From the top of the hill at Cladda, Grant sent B Seven a salute and a blessing. But for B Seven he would not be sitting above this sodden world feeling like a king. New-born and self-owning. He was something more than B Seven's champion now: he was his debtor. His servant.

As he left the shelter he had found for himself the wind caught him in the chest, and he leaned on it as he went downhill as he used to when he was a boy, so that it supported him and he could almost fall downhill in the most surprising manner and still be safe.

'How long do gales usually last in this part of the world?' he asked his host as they staggered through the darkness after supper towards the *ceilidh*.

'Three days is the minimum,' Mr Todd said, 'but that doesn't happen often. Last winter it blew for a month on end. You got so used

to the roar of it that if it died away for a moment you thought you'd gone deaf. You'd be better to fly back, when you go, than cross the Minch in this weather. Most people fly nowadays, even the old people who've never seen a train. They take aeroplanes for granted.'

It occurred to Grant that he might indeed fly back. That if he waited another few days, if he had a little longer to grow accustomed to his new-found well-being, he might use the air journey as a test. It would be a pretty severe test; the severest he could subject himself to. To any claustrophobic the prospect of being boxed into a small space and hung helplessly in the air was sheer horror. If he faced it without wincing, and accomplished it without disaster, then he could pronounce himself cured. He would be a man again.

But he would wait a little; it was too early yet to ask himself the question.

The *ceilidh* had been in progress for some twenty minutes when they arrived, and they stood with the rest of the male population at the back. Only the women and the ancients occupied the chairs in the hall. Except for a row of male heads in the very front, where the Importances of the island sat (Duncan Tavish, the merchant, who was uncrowned king of Cladda, the two Churches, and some lesser lights), the male population lined the walls at the back and clustered round the entrance. It was an abnormally cosmopolitan gathering, Grant noticed, as the outsiders made way for them; both the Swedes and the Hollanders had come in force, and there were accents that belonged to the Aberdeenshire coast.

A girl was singing in a thin soprano. Her voice was sweet and true but without expression. It was like someone trying over an air on a flute. She was succeeded by a self-confident youngish man who received an ovation, on which he plumed himself so obviously that it was funny; one waited for him to bill his breast feathers like a bird. He was a great favourite, it seemed, with audiences of exiled Gaels on the mainland and spent more time being encored there than he did on his neglected croft. He sang a hearty ditty in a rough overworked tenor and was cheered to the echo. It surprised Grant a little that he had never bothered to learn the rudiments of singing. He must, in his jaunts to the mainland, have met real singers, who had been taught how to use their voices; even in the case of someone so vain it was astonishing that he had not been moved to learn the basis of the art he professed.

Another woman sang another expressionless song, contralto, and a man recited a funny story. Except for the few phrases that he had learned from the old folk in Strathspey when he was a child, Grant understood no Gaelic, and listened as he would have listened to an entertainment in Italian or Tamil. Except for the delight of the people themselves in the thing, it was a sufficiently dull affair. The songs were musically negligible; some of them deplorable. If this was the kind of thing that people came to the Hebrides to 'gather', then they were hardly worth the gathering. The few inspired songs had, like all products of inspiration, gone over the world on their own wings. It was better that these feeble imitations should be left to die.

Throughout the concert there was a continuous coming and going among the men at the back of the hall, but Grant had been aware of it only as an obbligato, until his arm was pressed and a voice said in his ear: 'Could you be doing with a wee drop yourself, perhaps?' and he realised that Island hospitality was offering him a share of the scarcest commodity known to Island economy. Since it would have been ungracious to refuse, he thanked his benefactor and followed him out into the darkness. Against the lee wall of the meeting-place leaned a representative minority of the male population of Cladda in a contented silence. A flat two-gill bottle was thrust into his hands. 'Slainte!' he said, and took a swig of it. A hand, guided by an eye more acclimatised to the dark than his own, took the bottle back from him and a voice wished him health in return. Then he followed his unknown friend back to the lighted hall. Presently he saw Mr Todd being surreptitiously tapped on the arm, and Mr Todd too went out into the darkness to be sustained with something out of the bottle. It could happen nowhere else, Grant thought. Unless in the States during prohibition. Not much wonder that the Scots were silly and arch and coy about whisky. (Except of course in Strathspey, where the stuff was made. In Strathspey they put the bottle in the middle of the table, as matter-of-factly as an Englishman would, if a little more proudly.) Not much wonder that they behaved as if there was something very dashing, not to say, daring, about having a drink of whisky. The surprising, the knowing leer with which the ordinary Scot referred to his national drink could only come from inherited knowledge of prohibition: either the Kirk's or the Law's.

Warmed by his mouthful out of the flat bottle, he listened tolerantly to Duncan Tavish being confident and long-winded in Gaelic. He was introducing a guest who had come a long way to speak to them. A guest who needed no introduction from him or from anyone; whose own achievements spoke for themselves. (Nevertheless Duncan spoke for them at length.) Grant did not catch the Gaelic name of the guest, but he was aware that the renegades from outside came pressing in at the sound of the cheering that greeted Mr Tavish's peroration. Either the speaker was the real interest of the evening or the whisky had given out.

He watched in idle curiosity the small figure detach itself from the front row, clamber up on to the platform with the aid of the piano, and stride into the middle of it.

It was Wee Archie.

Wee Archie looked even odder in Cladda than he had on Clune moor; his stature more inadequate, his cockatoo brightness more startling. The kilt was not the dress of the islands, and among all these sober-coloured males in their thick, stiff clothes he looked more than ever 'a souvenir doll'. Without his dashing bonnet with its sprouting greenery he looked somehow undressed, like a policeman without his helmet. His hair was very scanty, and was drawn in thin strings across the top of his head to hide the bare patch. He was like something out of a not very expensive Christmas stocking.

However, there was no qualification to the welcome he was given. Apart from the Royal Family, in person and *in toto*, Grant could think of no one who could be guaranteed the equivalent of the reception that Wee Archie was now being accorded. Even discounting the effect of libations at the lee end, it was surprising. And the silence that succeeded it when he began to talk was flattering. Grant wished that he could see the faces. He remembered that Bella from Lewis had had no use for his back-door proselytising; and what Pat Rankin thought of him would not go through the post. But what did these Islanders, cut off from the world and from the variety that alone could teach a man to judge between this and that, what did these Islanders think of him? Here was the material of his dreams; innocent, acquisitive, self-conscious, egotistical. They could not be subverted to another rule, the Islanders, because no one had ever ruled them in any real sense. A Government was there, as far as the Islanders were concerned, to be milked of benefits and diddled out of its dues. But their separateness could be played upon to alienate sympathy; their opportunism could be sharpened by dangled benefits. In Cladda, Wee Archie was not the embarrassing nonentity he had been at Lochan Dhu; in Cladda he was a possible power. Cladda and all its attendant islands represented, in the ultimate reckoning, submarine bases, smuggling points, stepping-off places,

watch-towers, airfields, patrol bases. What did the Islanders think of Gilleasbuig Mac-a'-Bruithainn and his creed? He wished that he could see the faces

For half an hour Wee Archie spoke to them in his thin, angry voice, with passion and without pause, and they listened without a sound. And then Grant, casting a glance at the rows of seats in front of him, thought that they looked less full than they had been at the beginning of the evening. This was so unlikely that he took his attention from Archie to consider the matter. He caught a stealthy movement along the trough between Row 5 and Row 6 and followed it with his eye until it reached the end of the row. There it stood upright and materialised into the person of Katie-Ann. With no fuss at all Katie-Ann, still with demure eyes fixed on the speaker, faded backwards through the standing rows of males and disappeared into the outer air.

Grant watched a little longer and found that this melting process was continuous, both among the seated audience and among the males standing round the walls. The audience was melting away invisibly under Archie's very nose. This was so unusual—a country audience will always wait to the end however boring an entertainment—that Grant turned to Mr Todd and whispered: 'Why are they leaving?'

'They're going to watch the ballet.'

'The ballet?'

'Television. It's their great treat. Everything else they see on television is just a version of something they've seen already. Plays, and singing, and what not. But ballet is something they've never seen before. They wouldn't miss ballet for anything or anyone....What is so amusing about that?'

But Grant was not amused by Cladda's passion for ballet. He was enjoying Archie's so-unlikely disarming. Poor Archie. Poor wee deluded Archie. He had been overthrown by an arabesque, foiled by an *entrechat*, defeated by a *plié*. It was fantastically appropriate.

'Have they gone for good?'

'Oh, no, they'll be back for the dance.'

And back they were, in force. Every soul on the island was at the dance; the ancients sitting round, and the active taking the roof off with their wild yelling. It was less agile dancing than Grant was used to on the mainland, less graceful; for Highland dancing one needed the kilt, and the soft thonged shoes that made no sound on the floor and let a man dance like a flame among the sword points. The Island dancing had much of the Irish in it; much of the sad Irish immobility that left the dancing a matter of foot-work only, and not an uprush of joy that filled a man to the last finger-tip of his up-flung hands. But if the dancing itself lacked art and gaiety there was a fine wholesale merriment in its stamping performance. There was room, with some squeezing, for three eightsomes, and sooner or later everyone, including the Swedes and the Hollanders, were dragged into this orgy of exercise. A fiddle and a piano gave out the lovely floating rhythm (for that one needed a regimental band, thought Grant as he swung Katie-Ann into the arms of a delighted Swede, one needed that double drum-beat and pause; it might not be purist but it certainly was effective) and the hands of those at rest beat time. The wind howled along the skylights on the roof, the dancers yelled, the fiddle sawed, and the piano thumped, and a wonderful time was had by all.

Including Alan Grant.

He swayed home through the stinging lash of hail wielded by a pitiless south-wester, and dropped into bed drunk with exercise and fresh air. It had been a delightful day.

It had also been a profitable one. He would have something to tell Ted Hanna when he got back to town. He knew now who Archie Brown's 'ravens' were.

Tonight he did not look at the closed window with misgiving. Nor tonight did he forget it altogether. He looked at the closed window and was glad of it. He had absorbed the Island point of view that a window is there to keep out the weather.

He burrowed into his cotton-quilt nest, out of the wind and the weather, and fell into dreamless depths of sleep.

Wee Archie departed next morning when 'the boat' called, on his way to spread light throughout all the other dark places of the archipelago. He had been staying with the Reverend Mr MacKay, it transpired; and Grant wondered what that blameless padre to a Highland regiment would think if he knew what he had been sheltering under his roof. Or was the Reverend Mr MacKay, too, sick of Archie Brown's disease?

On the whole Grant thought not.

Mr MacKay had all the authority that mortal man could crave; he had a satisfaction for his vanity every Sunday morning; he had seen the world, and life and death, and men's souls in relation to both, and he was not likely to hanker after esoteric glories. He had merely been host to a Scottish celebrity. For in a small country like Scotland Archie ranked as a celebrity, and Mr MacKay was no doubt greatly pleased to entertain him.

So Grant had the island to himself, and for five days in the company of the whooping wind he quartered his bleak kingdom. It was rather like walking with a bad-mannered dog; a dog that rushes past you on narrow paths, leaps on you in ecstasy so that you are nearly knocked over, and drags you from the direction in which you want to go. He spent his evenings with his legs stretched out to the office fire listening to Mr Todd's tales of pub-owning in the Lowlands. He ate enormously. He put on weight visibly. He slept as soon as his head touched the pillow and woke only when it was morning. And by the end of the fifth day he was ready to face a hundred air journeys rather than spend another twelve hours in the place.

So on the sixth morning he stood on the great flat of white sand waiting for the little plane to pick him up on its way back from Stornoway. And the small misgiving somewhere in the depths of him was nothing like the pervading apprehension with which he had expected to be filled at this moment. Mr Todd stood with him, and beside them on the sand was his small case. Up on the grass, where the road ended, was the Cladda Hotel car, the only one on the island and the only one of its class anywhere in the world. They stood there, four tiny dark objects in the shining waste, watching the small bird-like thing in the sky drop down to them.

This, Grant thought, was as near to the original idea of flight as one was likely to get nowadays. As someone had pointed out, when man first dreamed of flying he had seen himself rising on his own silver wings into the blue empyrean, but it hadn't turned out at all like that. First he was trundled to a field, then he was shut in a box, then he was terrified, then he was sick, then he was in Paris. Being picked up from the sands on the sea-ward fringe of the world by a casual-alighting bird was as near as one would ever come to the free soaring of man's original vision.

The great bird idled up to them along the sand, and for a moment Grant panicked. It was, when all was said, a box. A tight-closed trap of a thing. But the casualness of everything loosened his rigid muscles almost as soon as they had stiffened. In the clinical order of an airport, shepherded and compelled, panic might have conquered. But here, on the open sand, with the pilot draped about the top step as he gossiped with Mr Todd, and the crying of gulls and the smell of the sea, it was a thing one could take or leave. There was no compulsion to be afraid of.

So when the moment came he put his foot over the last step with nothing more than a slight heart-quickening. And before he could analyse his reaction to that closing door a nearer interest caught his mind. In front of him, on the other side of the gangway, was Wee Archie

Wee Archie looked as if he had just got out of bed, and as if he had done that getting-out in some hurry. His dishevelled splendour looked more than ever as if they were someone's else's clothes altogether. He looked like a discarded armature with some studio props flung on top of it. He greeted Grant like an old friend, condescended to him about his ignorance of the Islands, recommended Gaelic to him as a language it would pay him to study, and went back to sleep. Grant sat and looked at him.

The little bastard, he thought. The vain, worthless little bastard.

Archie's mouth had fallen open, and the strands of black hair no longer covered the thin patch. The knees above the fat brilliant socks were more like anatomical specimens than any mechanism designed for the propulsion of a living being. They weren't knees; they were 'the knee joint'. The articulation of the fibula was particularly interesting.

The vain vicious little bastard. He had had a profession that would give him his bread and butter, a profession that would have given him a certain standing, a profession that would have brought him spiritual reward. But that had not satisfied his egotistical soul. He had needed the limelight. And as long as he could strut in the light he did not care who paid for the illumination.

Grant was still considering the fundamental part that vanity played in the make-up of the criminal when a geometrical pattern opened below him like a Japanese flower in water. He took his thoughts from psychological matters in order to consider this Euclidean phenomenon in a world of nature and found that they were circling the mainland airport. He had flown back from Cladda and had hardly been aware of it.

He climbed down on to the tarmac and wondered what would happen if he did a war-dance of joy there and then. He wanted to go whooping and prancing round the aerodrome like a child on his first hobby-horse. Instead he went to the telephone booths and asked Tommy if he could pick him up at the Caledonian in Scoone in about two hours. Tommy could and would.

The food at the airport restaurant tasted like Lucas-Carton, the Tour d'Argent, and La Crémaillière all rolled into one. The man at the next table was complaining bitterly about it. But he of course had not just been reborn after five months of hell and seven days of Katie-Ann.

Tommy's round, kind face in the lounge of the Caledonian looked rounder and kinder than even Tommy's face had ever looked before.

There was no wind.

No wind at all.

It was a beautiful world.

What a frightful anticlimax it would be, he thought, if when he got into the car with Tommy the old horror overcame him. Perhaps the thing was just waiting there for him, licking its lips with anticipation.

But there was nothing in the car. Just himself and Tommy and the good relaxed atmosphere of their habitual intercourse. They drove away into the country, an appreciably greener country than it had been ten days ago, and the evening sun came out and sent long golden fingers of light across the calm fields.

'How did the Moymore ceremony come off?' he asked. 'The bouquet presentation.'

'Oh, heavens: that!' Tommy said, making motions as of a man mopping his forehead.

'Didn't he present it?'

'If letting her have it is presenting it, I suppose technically he presented it. He handed it over with a speech he had thought up himself.'

'What kind of speech?'

'I think he had been rehearsing a sort of get-out for himself ever since we talked him into it by making Zoë Kentallen a rebel of some kind. Which was Laura's idea, by the way, not mine. Well, when she stooped to take the great bush of carnations from him—she's very tall—he held them out of her reach for a moment and said firmly: "I'm only giving you this, mind, because you're a fellow-revolutionary." She took it without batting an eyelid. She said: "Yes, of course. How very kind of you," although she hadn't an idea what he was talking about. She bowled him over, by the way.'

'How?'

'In the good old female way. Pat is in the throes of his first infatuation.'

Grant looked forward to seeing this phenomenon.

Clune lay very peaceful in its green hollow, and Grant looked at it as one coming home victorious from battle. Last time he had driven up that sandy road he had been a slave; now he was a free man. He had gone out to look for B Seven and had found himself.

Laura came out to meet him at the doorstep and said: 'Alan, have you taken to a tipster's business on the side?'

'No. Why?'

'Or one of those Lonely Hearts columns, or something?'

'No.'

'Because Mrs Mair says there is a whole sackful of mail waiting for you at the post-office.'

'Oh. How did Mrs Mair know that the letters were for me?'

'She said you were the only A. Grant in the district. I take it you haven't advertised for a wife?'

'No, just for a bit of information,' he said, going with her into the sitting-room.

The room in the early dusk was full of fire light and wavering shadows. He thought it was empty until he noticed that someone was sitting in the big wing-chair by the hearth. A woman; so long and slender that she seemed as fluid as the shadows and he had to look a second time to be sure that she was not in truth a shadow.

'Lady Kentallen,' said Laura's voice behind him, in an introducing tone. 'Zoë has come back to Clune for a few days' fishing.'

The woman leant forward to shake hands with him and he saw that she was a girl.

'Mr Grant,' she said, greeting him. 'Laura says that you like to be called Mr.'

'Yes. Yes, I do. "Inspector" has a grim sound in private life.'

'And a little unreal, too,' she said in her gentle voice. 'Like something out of a detective story.'

'Yes; people expect you to say: "Where were you on the evening of the umpteenth inst?" How could this virginal creature be the mother of three sons, one of them nearly old enough to leave school? 'Have you been having any luck on the river?'

'I had a nice grilse this morning. You are going to have it for supper.'

She had the kind of beauty that allows a woman to part her hair in the middle and wear it smooth to her head. A dark, small head on a long graceful neck.

He remembered suddenly about the newly decorated bedroom. So the fresh paint had been for Zoë Kentallen, and not for Laura's latest candidate for his interest. That was an enormous relief. It had been bad enough to have Laura's selections put under his nose, but to have had the latest one actually under the same roof would have been, to put it mildly, tiresome.

'The Oban train must have been in time for once,' Laura said, remarking on his early arrival.

'Oh, he flew back,' Tommy said, throwing another log on the fire. He said it casually, unaware that the fact had any importance.

Grant looked over at Laura and saw her face light with happiness. She turned her head to find him among the shadows and saw that he was looking at her, and smiled. Had it mattered so much to her then? Dear Lalla. Dear kind understanding Lalla.

They began to talk about the Islands. Tommy had a fine tale of a man whose hat blew off as he was boarding a boat in Barra and who found it waiting for him on the pier at Mallaig. Laura was funny about the impossibility of carrying on a conversation in a language that has no words for anything less than two hundred years old and supplied an imaginary account of a road accident. ('Blahblah bicycle blah-blah S-bend blah-blah brakes blah-blah traction-engine blah-blah ambulance blah-blah stretcher blah-blah anaesthetic blah-blah private ward blah-blah temperature-chart blah-blah chrysanthemums freezias ranunculus narcissus carnations....') Zoë had stayed in the Islands as a child and was very knowledgeable about poaching salmon; an art she had been taught by local talent under the very nose of her host's game-keeper.

Grant was pleased to find that the family atmosphere of Clune had been in no way disturbed by the presence of this guest. She seemed unaware of her beauty, and unexpectant of attention. He was not surprised that Pat had been 'bowled over'.

It was only when his bedroom door finally closed on him and he was alone that his mind went to that waiting sack of letters in the post-office at Moymore. A sack of them! Well, that was not unbearably surprising, after all. A life in the C.I.D. conditioned one to the existence of the letter-writer. There were people whose only interest in life was writing letters. To the newspapers, to authors, to strangers, to City Councils, to the police. It did not much matter to whom; the satisfaction of writing seemed to be all. Seven-eighths of

that pile of letters would be the product of those whose hobby was writing letters.

But there was still the odd eighth.

What would the odd eighth have to say?

In the morning he watched the guest getting her tackle ready for the river and wished that he was going with her, but still more he wanted to go to the post-office at Moymore. She set off without fuss, self-sufficient and unobtrusive, and Grant, watching her walk down the path, thought that she was more like an adolescent boy than a prospective dowager. She was wearing very elegant trousers and a disreputable old lumber jacket, and he remarked to Tommy that she was one of the few women who looked really well in trousers.

'She's the only woman in the world,' Tommy said, 'who looks beautiful in waders.'

So Grant went away to interview Mrs Mair at Moymore. Mrs Mair hoped that he had a secretary and presented him with a paperknife. It was a thin silver affair, very tarnished, with a thistle head made of amethyst. When he pointed out that the thing was hallmarked and of some value nowadays and that he could not accept expensive presents from strange women, she said:

'Mr Grant, that thing has been in my shop for twenty-five years. It was made for the souvenir trade in the days when people could read. Now they just look and listen. You're the first person I've met in a quarter of a century that *needed* a paper-knife. Indeed, by the time you've slit open all the letters in that sack, you'll need more than a paper-knife, I'm thinking. Anyway it's the first and last time I'll ever have a sack of mail addressed to one person in this office and I'd like to mark the occasion. So you take the wee knife!'

He took it gratefully, hoisted the sack into the car, and went back to Clune.

'The bag's post-office property,' she said after him, 'so see you bring it back!'

He took the sack to his own room, polished the little knife until it shone with a pleased and grateful air as if glad to be noticed after all those years, emptied the bag on to the floor, and slipped the knife into the first letter to come to hand. The first letter asked him how he dared expose to the public gaze the words the writer had written, with such pain and heart-searching, in the spring of 1911, under the orders of her spirit guide Azul. It was like being publicly exhibited without clothes, to see her own precious lines so wantonly laid bare.

Thirteen other correspondents claimed to have written the lines (without spirit guidance) and asked what was in it for them. Five sent the completed poem—five different poems—and claimed that they were the author of it. Three accused him of blasphemy, and seven said he was plagiarising from Revelations. One said: 'Thank you very much for an evening's entertainment, old boy, and how is the fishing on the Turlie this year?' One directed him to the Apocrypha, one to the Arabian Nights, one to Rider Haggard, one to Theosophy, one to Grand Canyon, and five to various parts of Central and South America. Nine sent him cures for alcoholism, and twenty-two sent him circulars about esoteric cults. Two suggested subscriptions to poetry magazines, and one offered to teach him to write salable verse. One said: 'If you are the A. Grant I sat through the monsoon with at Bishenpur this is my present address.' One said: 'If you are the A. Grant I spent the night with in a rest hotel in Amalfi this is just to say hullo, and I wish my husband was as good.' One sent him particulars of a Clan Grant association. Nine were obscene. Three were illegible.

There were one hundred and seventeen letters.

The one that gave him most pleasure was one that read: 'I've fathomed your code, you bloody traitor, and I shall report you to the Special Branch.'

Not one of them was of any help at all.

Oh, well. He had not really hoped. It had been a shot in the dark.

He had at least had some amusement out of it. Now he could settle down and fish until the end of his sick-leave. He wondered how long Zoë Kentallen was staying.

The guest had taken sandwiches with her and did not appear for lunch, but in the afternoon Grant took his rod and followed her down to the river. She had probably already fished the whole of the Clune water, but perhaps she did not know it as well as he did. She might be glad of some unobtrusive advice. Not, of course, that he was going down to the river for the sole purpose of talking to her. He was going to fish. But he would have to find out first which part of the water she herself was fishing. And he could hardly, having found her, pass with a casual wave of the hand.

He did not pass at all, of course. He sat on the bank watching her drop a Green Highlander above the big one that she had been pursuing with various lures for the last hour. 'He just thumbs his nose at me,' she said. 'It has become a personal affair between us.' She used her rod with the ease of someone who has fished since she was a child; almost absent-mindedly, as Laura did. It was very satisfying to watch.

He gaffed the fish for her an hour later, and they sat together on the grass and ate the rest of her sandwiches. She asked about his work, not as if it was a sensational matter, but as she might inquire about it if he had been an architect or an engine-driver; and told him about her three boys and what they were going to be. Her simplicity was indestructible, and her unselfconsciousness child-like in its completeness.

'Nigel will be sick when he hears that I have been fishing the Turlie,' she said. She said it as a girl might say it of a schoolboy brother; and he deduced that this described with fair accuracy the relationship between herself and her sons.

There were hours yet of daylight, but neither of them made any move to go back to the river. They sat there looking down on the brown water and talked. Grant, out of his wide acquaintance, tried to think of an equivalent to her, and failed. None of the beautiful women he had seen in his time had had her fairy-princess quality; her air of timeless youth. A stray from Tir nan Og, he thought. It was surprising that she should, soberly considered, be the same age as Laura.

'Did you know Laura well at school?'

'Not bosom-friend well. I was terribly in awe of her, you see.'

'In awe? Of Laura?'

'Yes. She was very clever, you know, and good at everything, and I never could add two and two.'

Since part of his delight in her was the contrast between her Hans Andersen-illustration quality and her practicality, he deduced that

this was an exaggeration. But it was probably true that she had no—no branches to her, so to speak. No multitude of leaves to breathe the air of the world. The climate of her mind was uncritical. Her utterance had none of Laura's glancing comment; none of Laura's swift interest and dissection.

'We are very lucky, you and Laura and I, to have known the Highlands when we were children,' she said, when they were talking of early fishing experiences. 'That is what I should wish most for a child. To have a beautiful calf-country. When David—my husband—was killed they wanted me to sell Kentallen. We had never had much money, and the Death Duties took the margin that made the place workable. But I wanted to hang on to it at least until Nigel and Timmy and Charles are grown-up. They will hate losing it, but at least they will have had the years that matter in a beautiful country.'

He looked at her, putting her tackle neatly away in its box with the sober care of a tidy child, and thought that the solution of her problem was surely remarriage. The West End that he knew so well was lousy with sleek men in shiny cars who could keep Kentallen with no more effort than they would keep a Japanese garden in one of the rooms that they called lounges. The difficulty was, he supposed, that in Zoë Kentallen's world money was neither an introduction nor an absolution.

The spring sunlight faded. The skies grew luminous. The hills went far away and lay down, as Laura had once said as a child; describing in eight easy words the whole look and atmosphere of an evening of settled weather when tomorrow is going to be a wonderful day.

'We ought to be getting back,' Zoë said.

As he picked up their fishing things from the bank he thought that there had been more magic in this one afternoon on the Turlie than in all the much advertised Islands of the West.

'You love your work, don't you?' she said as they walked up the hill to Clune. 'Laura told me that you could have retired years ago if you had wanted to.'

'Yes,' he said, a little surprised. 'I suppose that I could have retired. My mother's sister left me a legacy. She married a man who did well in Australia and she had no children.'

'What would you do if you retired?'

'I don't know. I have never even considered it.'

But that night, going to sleep, he did consider it. Not as a prospect, but with speculation. What would it be like to retire? To retire while he was still young enough to begin something else? If he began something else what would it be? A sheep-farm like Tommy's? That would be a good life. But could he make a success of an entirely country existence? He doubted it. And if not, then what else could he do?

He played with this nice new toy until he fell asleep and he took it to the river with him next morning. One of the really charming facets of the game was the thought of Bryce's face when he read his resignation. Bryce would not merely be short of staff for a week or two; he would find himself deprived for good and all of his most valued subordinate. It was a delicious thought.

He fished his favourite pool, below the swing bridge, and conducted delightful conversations with Bryce. Because of course there would be a conversation. He would give himself the ineffable delight of laying that written resignation on the desk in front of Bryce's nose; laying it there himself, in person. Then there would be some really satisfying chat, and he would walk out into the street a free man.

Free to do what?

To be himself, at the beck and call of nobody.

To do things he had always wanted to do and had had no time for. To mess about in small boats, for instance.

To get married, perhaps.

Yes, to get married. With leisure there would be time to share his life. Time to love and be loved.

This lasted him very happily for another hour.

About noon he became aware that he was not alone. He looked up and saw that a man was standing on the bridge watching him. He was standing only a few yards from the bank, and since the bridge was motionless he must have been there for some time. The bridge was the usual trough of wire floored with wooden slats, a structure so light that even the wind was capable of moving it. He was grateful to the stranger for not walking into the middle of the thing and swaying about there so that he distracted every fish in the neighbourhood.

He nodded to the man by way of expressing his approval.

'Your name Grant?' asked the man.

After the circumlocutions of a people so devious-minded that they had no word for No, it was pleasant to be asked a straight question in simple English.

'Yes,' he said, and wondered a little. The man sounded as if he might be an American.

'You the guy who put that advertisement in the paper?'

There was no doubt about the nationality this time.

'Yes

The man tipped his hat further back on his head and said in a resigned way: 'Oh, well. I'm crazy too, I guess, or I wouldn't be here.'

Grant began to reel in.

'Won't you come down, Mr-?'

The man moved off the bridge and came down the bank to him.

He was youngish, well-dressed, and pleasant-looking.

'My name is Cullen,' he said. 'Tad Cullen. I'm a flyer. I fly freight for OCAL. You know: Oriental Commercial Airlines Ltd.'

It was said that all you needed to fly for OCAL was a certificate and no sign of leprosy. But that was an exaggeration. Indeed, it was a perversion. You had to be good to fly for OCAL. In the big shiny passenger lines, if you made a mistake you were on the carpet. In OCAL, if you made a mistake you were out on your ear. OCAL had an unlimited supply of personnel to draw upon. OCAL cared nothing for your grammar, your colour, your antecedents, your manners, your nationality, or your looks, as long as you could fly. You had to be able to fly. Grant looked at Mr Cullen with a double interest.

'Look, Mr Grant, I know that that thing, those words in the paper, I know they were just some kind of quotation that you wanted identified, or something like that. And of course I can't identify them. I was never any good at books. I haven't come here to be any use to you. Quite the opposite, I guess. But I've been very worried, and I thought even a long shot like this might be worth trying. You see, Bill used words like that one night when he was a bit high—Bill's my buddy—and I thought, maybe, it might be a place. I mean the description might be a place. Even if it is a quotation. I'm afraid I'm not making myself very clear.'

Grant smiled a little and said No, not so far, but suppose they both sat down and straightened it out. 'Am I to understand that you have come here looking for me?'

'Yes, I actually came last night. But the post-office place was shut, so I got a bed at the inn. Moymore, they call it. And then I went to the post-office this morning and asked them where I could find the A. Grant who had a lot of letters. I was sure you'd have had a lot, you see, after that advertisement. And they said Oh, yes, if it was Mr Grant I wanted I would find him on the river somewhere. Well, I came down to look and the only other person on the river was a lady, so I guessed you must be it. You see it wasn't any good writing to you because I really hadn't anything that seemed worth putting on paper. I mean, it was just a daffy kind of hope. And you mightn't have bothered answering it anyway—when it had nothing to do with you, I mean.' He paused a moment, and added in a half-hopeful half-hoping-for-nothing tone: 'It isn't a night-club, is it?'

'What isn't?' Grant asked, surprised.

'That place with talking beasts at the door. And the odd scenery. It sounded like a fun-fair place. You know: the kind of place where you go in a boat through tunnels in the dark and see ridiculous and frightening things unexpectedly. But Bill wouldn't be interested in a place like that. So I thought of a night-club. You know: one of those got up with oddities to impress the customers. That would be much more Bill's mixture. Especially in Paris. And it was in Paris that I was to meet him.'

For the first time a gleam of light appeared.

'You mean that you were due to meet this Bill? And he didn't keep the appointment?'

'He didn't show up at all. And that's very unlike Bill. If Bill says he'll do a thing, or be in a place, or remember a thing, believe you me he'll deliver. That's why I'm so worried. And not a word of explanation. Not a message left at the hotel or anything. Of course they may have forgotten to put down the message, hotels being what they are. But even if they did forget, there would have been some follow-up. I mean, when I didn't react, Bill would have telephoned again saying: What are you up to, you old so-and-so, didn't you get my message? But there wasn't anything like that. It's funny, isn't it, that he would book a room and then not turn up to occupy it and not send a word in explanation?'

'Very strange indeed. Especially since you say your friend was a dependable type. But why were you interested in my advertisement? I mean: in connection with Bill? Bill—, what, by the way?'

'Bill Kenrick. He's a flyer like me. With OCAL. We've been friends for a year or two now. The best friend I ever had, I don't mind saying. Well, it was like this, Mr Grant. When he didn't turn up, and no one seemed to know anything about him or to have heard from him—and he had no people in England that I could write to—I thought about what other ways there were of communicating with people. Other than telephones and letters and telegrams and what not. And so I thought of what you call the Agony Column. You know: in the newspapers. So I got the Paris edition of the *Clarion*—the files, I mean, at their Paris office—and went through them, and there was nothing. And then I tried *The Times*, and there was nothing there either. This was after some time, of course, so I had to go back through the files, but there was nothing. I was going to give it up because I thought that that was all the English papers that had regular Paris editions, but someone said why didn't I try the *Morning News*. Well, I went to the *News*, and there didn't seem to be anything from Bill, but there was this thing of yours that rang a bell. If Bill hadn't been missing I don't suppose I would have thought twice about it, but having heard Bill gabble something along those lines made me notice it and be interested. Are you with me, as Bill says?'

'Entirely. Go on. When was it that Bill talked about the odd landscape?'

'He didn't talk about it at all. He just babbled one night when we were all a little drunk. Bill doesn't drink, Mr Grant. I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I mean: drink as a habit. A few of the boys in our lot do, I admit, but they don't last long in OCAL. They don't last long anyway. That's why OCAL heaves them out. They don't mind them killing themselves, but it gets expensive in crates. But now and then we have a night-out like other people. And it was on one of those nights out that Bill got going. We were all a little high so I don't remember anything in detail. I know we were drinking toasts and we were running out of subjects by that time. And we were taking it in turn to think up unlikely things to toast. You know: like "The third daughter of the Lord Mayor of Bagdad", or "June Kaye's left little toe". And Bill said: "To Paradise!" and then gabbled a piece about talking beasts and singing sands and what not.'

'Didn't anyone ask about this Paradise of his?'

'No! The next fellow was just waiting to get his word in. No one was paying any attention to anything. They'd just think Bill's toast pretty dull. I wouldn't have remembered it myself if I hadn't come across the words in the paper when my mind was full of Bill.'

'And he never mentioned it again? Never talked about anything like that in his sober moments.'

'No. He isn't much of a talker at the best of times.'

'You think, perhaps, if he was greatly interested in something he would keep it to himself?'

'Oh, yes, he does that, he does that. He's not close, you know; just a bit cagey. In most ways he's the most open guy you could imagine. Generous with his roll, and careless with his things, and willing to do anything for anyone. But in the things that—in personal things, if you know what I mean, he sort of shuts the door on you.'

'Did he have a girl?'

'Not more than any of us can be said to have one. But that's a very good sample of what I mean. When the rest of us are out for an evening we take what's going. But Bill will go off by himself to some other quarter of the town where he has picked something more to his fancy.'

'What town?'

'Any town we happen to be in. Kuwait, Masquat, Quatif, Mukalla. Anything from Aden to Karachi, if it comes to that. Most of us fly scheduled routes, but some fly tramps. Take anything anywhere.'

'What did—does Bill fly?'

'He's flown all sorts. But lately he's been flying between the Gulf and the South Coast.'

'Arabia, you mean.'

'Yes. It's a damned dreary route but Bill seemed to like it. Me, I think he was too long on it. If you're too long on one route you get stale.'

'Why do you think he was too long on it? Had he changed at all?'

Mr Cullen hesitated. 'Not exactly. He was just the old Bill, easy-going and nice. But he got so that he couldn't leave it behind him.' 'Leave his work behind, you mean?'

'Yes. Most of us—all of us, in fact—drop work when we turn the bus over to the ground staff. We don't remember it until we say hullo to the mechanic in charge next morning. But Bill got so that he would pore over maps of the route as if he had never flown the hop before.'

'Why this interest in the route, do you think?'

'Well, I did think maybe he was figuring out a way to avoid the bad weather areas. It did begin—the interest in maps, I mean—one time when he came in very late after being blown out of his way by one of those terrific hurricanes that come out of nowhere in that

country. We had nearly given him up that time.'

'Don't you fly above the weather?'

'On a long hop, of course. But when you're flying freight you have to come down at the oddest places. So you're always more or less at the mercy of the weather.'

'I see. And you think Bill changed after that experience?'

'Well, I think it left a mark on him. I was there when he came in. In the plane, I mean. I was waiting for him, on the field. And he seemed to me a bit—concussed, if you get me.'

'Suffering from shock.'

'Yes. Still back there, if you know what I mean. Not really listening to what you said to him.'

'And after that he began to study maps. To plan his route, you think.'

'Yes. From then on it was in the forefront of his mind instead of being something that you drop with your working clothes. He even began to come in late as a habit. As if he went out of his way to look for an easier route.' He paused a moment, and then added in a quick warning tone: 'Please understand, Mr Grant, I'm not saying Bill has lost his nerve.'

'No, of course not.'

'Lost nerves don't take you that way at all, believe me. You get quite the opposite. You don't want to think of flying at all. You get short in the temper, and you drink too much and too early in the day, and you try to wangle short hops, and you go sick when there's nothing wrong with you. There's no mystery about lost nerve, Mr Grant. It announces itself like a name on a marquee. There was nothing like that about Bill—and I don't think there ever will be. It was just that he couldn't leave the thing behind.'

'It became an obsession with him.'

'That's about it, I suppose.'

'Did he have other interests?'

'He read books,' Mr Cullen said, in an apologetic way; as one confessing a peculiarity in a friend. 'Even in that, it showed.'

'How: showed?'

'I mean, instead of the books being the usual story affairs they'd as likely as not be about Arabia.'

'Yes?' Grant said, thoughtfully. Ever since this stranger had first mentioned Arabia, Grant had been altogether 'with him'. Arabia to all the world meant one thing: sand. And what was more, he realised that when he had had the feeling, that morning in the Scoone hotel, that 'singing sands' did actually exist somewhere, it was with Arabia that he should have connected them. Somewhere in Arabia there were in fact sands that were alleged to sing.

'So I was glad when he took his "leave" earlier than he meant to,' Mr Cullen was saying. 'We had planned to go together, and spend our leave in Paris. But he changed his mind and said he wanted a week or two in London first. He's English, you know. So we arranged to meet at the Hotel St Jacques in Paris. He was to meet me there on the 4th of March.'

'When?' said Grant; and was suddenly still. Mind and body still, like a pointer with the bird in sight; like a man with the target in his sights.

'The 4th of March, Why?'

Singing sands were anyone's interest. Men who fly for OCAL were two a penny. But the wide, vague, indefinite affair of Bill Kenrick who was obsessed with Southern Arabia and did not turn up to his appointments in Paris narrowed suddenly to one small focused point. To a date.

On the 4th of March, when Bill Kenrick should have turned up in Paris, the London mail had come into Scoone bearing the dead body of a young man who was interested in singing sands. A young man with reckless eyebrows. A young man who, on looks, would have made a very likely flyer. Grant remembered that he had tried him, in imagination, on the bridge of a small ship; a fast small ship, hell in any kind of a sea. He had looked well there. But he would look just as well at the controls of a plane.

'Why did Bill choose Paris?'

'Why does anyone choose Paris!'

'It wasn't because he was French?'

'Bill? No, Bill's English. Very English.'

'Did you ever see his passport?'

'Not that I can remember. Why?'

'You don't think that he might have been French by birth?'

It wouldn't work out, anyway. The Frenchman was called Martin. Unless his English upbringing had made him want to adopt an English name?

'You don't happen to have a photograph of your friend, do you?'

But Mr Cullen's attention was on something else. Grant turned to look, and found that Zoë was approaching them along the river bank. He looked at his watch.

'Hell!' he said. 'And I promised to have the stove going!' He turned to his bag and fished the primus from it.

'Your wife?' asked Mr Cullen, with that refreshing frankness. In the Islands it would have taken five minutes conversation to have elicited that information from him.

'No. That's Lady Kentallen.'

'Lady? A title?'

'Yes,' Grant said, busy with the stove. 'She is Viscountess Kentallen.'

Mr Cullen considered this in silence for a little.

'I supposed that's a sort of marked-down Countess.'

'No. On the contrary. A very superior kind. Practically a Marchioness. Look, Mr Cullen, let's postpone this matter of your friend for a little. It's a matter that interests me more than I can say, but—'

'Yes, of course, I'll go. When can I talk to you again about it?'

'Of course you will not go! You'll stay and have some food with us.'

'You mean you want me to meet this Marchioness, this—whatyoumaycallit, Viscountess?'

'Why not? She is a very nice person to meet. One of the nicest persons I know.'

'Yes?' Mr Cullen looked with interest at the approaching Zoë. 'She's certainly very nice to look at. I didn't know they came like that. Somehow I imagined all aristocrats had beaky noses.'

'Specially provided for looking down, I take it.

'Something like that.'

'I don't know how far back in English history one would have to go to find an aristocratic nose that was looked down. I doubt if you'd find one at all. The only place to find a looked-down nose is in the suburbs. In what is known as lower-middle-class circles.'

Mr Cullen looked puzzled. 'But the aristocrats keep themselves to themselves and look down on the rest, don't they?'

'It has never been possible in England for any class to keep themselves to themselves, as you call it. They have been intermarrying at all levels for two thousand years. There never have been separate and distinct classes—or an aristocratic class at all in the sense that you mean it.'

'I suppose nowadays things are even-ing up,' Mr Cullen suggested, faintly unbelieving.

'Oh, no. It has always been a fluid thing. Even our Royalty. Elizabeth the First was the grand-daughter of a Lord Mayor. And you'll find that Royalty's personal friends have no titles at all: I mean the people who are on calling-terms at Buckingham Palace. Whereas the bold bad baron who sits next you in an expensive restaurant probably started life as a platelayer on the railway. There is no keeping oneself to oneself in England, as far as class goes. It can't be done. It can only be done by Mrs Jones who sniffs at her neighbour Mrs Smith because Mr Jones makes two pounds a week more than Mr Smith.'

He turned from the puzzled American to greet Zoë. 'I'm truly sorry about the stove. I'm afraid I got it going too late to be ready. We were having a very interesting conversation. This is Mr Cullen, who flies freight for Oriental Commercial Airlines.'

Zoë shook hands, and asked him what kind of plane he flew.

From the tone of his voice when he told her Grant deduced that Mr Cullen thought that Zoë was merely taking a condescending interest. Condescension was what he would expect from an 'aristocrat'.

'They're very heavy in hand, aren't they?' Zoë remarked sympathetically. 'My brother used to fly one when he was on the Australia run. He was always cursing it.' She began to open the packets of food. 'But now that he works in an office in Sydney he has a little runabout of his own. A Beamish Eight. A lovely thing. I used to fly it when he first bought it; before he took it to Australia. David —my husband—and I used to dream of having one too, but we could never afford it.'

'But a Beamish Eight costs only four hundred,' Mr Cullen blurted.

Zoë licked her fingers, sticky from a leaking apple tart, and said: 'Yes, I know, but we never had four hundred to spare.'

Mr Cullen, feeling himself being washed out to sea, sought some terra firma.

'I oughtn't to be eating your food this way,' he said. 'They'll have plenty for me back at the hotel. I really ought to go back.'

'Oh, don't go,' Zoë said with a simplicity so genuine that it penetrated even Mr Cullen's defences. 'There is enough for a platoon.'

So to Grant's pleasure in more ways than one, Mr Cullen stayed. And Zoë, unaware that she was providing the United States with a revised view of the genus English Aristocrat, ate like a hungry schoolboy and talked in her gentle voice to the stranger as if she had known him all her life. By the apple tart stage, Mr Cullen had ceased to be on his guard. By the time that they were handing round the chocolates that Laura had included he had surrendered unconditionally.

They sat together in the spring sunshine, full-fed and content. Zoë lying back against the grassy bank with her feet crossed and her hands behind her head, her eyes closed against the sun. Grant with his mind busy with B Seven, and the material that Tad Cullen had brought him. Mr Cullen himself perched on a rock looking down the river to the green civilised strath where the moors ended and the fields began.

'It's a fine little country, this,' he said. 'I like it. If you ever decide to fight for your freedom, count me in.'

'Freedom?' said Zoë, opening her eyes. 'Freedom from whom or what?'

'From England, of course.'

Zoë looked helpless, but Grant began to laugh. 'I think you must have been talking to a little black man in a kilt,' he said.

'He had a kilt, yes, but he wasn't coloured,' Mr Cullen said.

'No, I meant black-haired. You've been talking to Archie Brown.'

'Who is Archie Brown?' asked Zoë.

'He is the self-appointed saviour of Gaeldom, and our future Sovereign, Commissar, President or what have you, when Scotland has freed herself from the murderous burden of the English yoke.'

'Oh, yes. That man,' Zoë said mildly, identifying Archie in her mind. 'He is a little off his head, isn't he? Does he live around here?'

 $\hbox{`He is staying at the hotel at Moymore, I understand. He has been doing missionary work on Mr Cullen, it seems.'}$

'Well,' Mr Cullen grinned a little sheepishly, 'I did just wonder if he wasn't over-stating things a bit. I've met some Scots in my time and they didn't seem to me to be the kind of people to put up with the treatment Mr Brown was describing. Indeed, if you'll forgive me, Mr Grant, they always seemed to me the kind of people to get the best of whatever bargain was going.'

'Did you ever hear the Union better described?' Grant said to Zoë.

'I never knew anything about the Union,' Zoë said comfortably, 'except that it took place in 1707.'

'Was there a battle, then?' Mr Cullen asked.

'No,' Grant said. 'Scotland stepped thankfully on to England's band-wagon, and fell heir to all the benefits. Colonies, Shakespeare, soap, solvency and so forth.'

'I hope Mr Brown doesn't go lecture-touring in the States,' Zoë said, half asleep.

'He will,' Grant said. 'He will. All vociferous minorities go lecture-touring in the States.'

'It will give them very wrong ideas, won't it?' Zoë said mildly. Grant thought with what a blistering phrase Laura would have expressed the same idea. 'They have the oddest ideas. When David and I were there, the year before he was killed, we were always being asked why we didn't stop taxing Canada. When we said we had never taxed Canada they just looked at us as if we were telling lies. Not very good lies, either.'

From Mr Cullen's expression Grant deduced that he too had had 'odd' ideas about Canadian taxation, but Zoë's eyes were closed. Grant wondered if Mr Cullen realised that Zoë was quite unaware that he was an American; that it had not occurred to her to consider his accent, his nationality, his clothes or any personal thing about him. She had accepted him as he stood, as a person. He was just a flyer, like her brother; someone who had turned up in time to share their picnic and who was pleasant and interesting to talk to. It would not occur to her to pigeon-hole him, to put him in any special category. If she was conscious at all of his narrow a's she no doubt took him for a North-countryman.

He looked at her, half asleep there in the sun, and thought how beautiful she was. He looked across at Mr Cullen and saw that he too was looking at Zoë Kentallen and thinking how beautiful she was. Their glances met and ran away from each other.

But Grant, who last night could imagine no greater felicity than to sit and look at Zoë Kentallen, was conscious now of a faint impatience with her, and this so shocked him that he took it out, in his self-analytical way, to examine it. What flaw could there be in this divinity? What imperfection in this princess from a fairy-tale?

'You know very well what's wrong,' said that irreverent voice in him. 'You want her to get the hell out of here so that you can find out about B Seven.'

And for once he did not try to contradict the voice. He did in brutal fact wish that Zoë would 'get the hell out of here'. The Zoë whose very presence had made magic of yesterday afternoon was now an encumbrance. Tiny prickles of boredom chased each other up and down his spine. Lovely, simple, heavenly Zoë, do get a move on. Creature of delight and princess of my dreams, go away.

He was rehearsing phrases for taking his own departure, when she gave the abrupt half-sigh half-yawn of a child and said: 'Well, there is a seven-pounder in the Cuddy Pool that must be finding life dull without me.' And with her usual lack of fuss or chat she took her things and departed into the spring afternoon.

Mr Cullen looked after her approvingly, and Grant waited for comment. But it seemed that Mr Cullen too had been waiting for the departure of his 'marked-down Countess'. He watched her out of earshot and then said immediately:

'Mr Grant, why did you ask me if I had a photograph of Bill? Does that mean that you think you know him?'

'No. No. But it would eliminate people who could not be Bill.'

'Oh. Yes. Well, I haven't one in my pocket but I have one in my grip at the hotel. It isn't a very good one, but it would give you the general idea. Could I bring it to you sometime?'

'No. I'll walk down to Moymore with you now.'

'You will? You're certainly very kind, Mr Grant. You think you've got a line on this thing? You haven't told me what those words were. That quotation or whatever it was. That's really what I came to ask you. What the talking-beasts thing was all about. If it was a place he was interested in, you see, he might have gone there, and I could go there too and cross his trail that way.'

'You're very fond of this Bill, aren't you?'

'Well, we've been together quite a time and though we're opposites in most ways we get along fine. Just fine. I wouldn't like anything to happen to Bill.'

Grant changed the conversation and asked about Tad Cullen's own life. And while they walked down the glen to Moymore he heard about the clean small town back in the States, and what a dull place it seemed to a boy who could fly, and how wonderful the East had seemed in the distance and how unexciting close up.

'Just Main Street with some smells,' Mr Cullen said.

'What did you do in Paris during your long wait for Bill to turn up?'

'Oh, I helled around some. It wasn't much fun without Bill. I met a couple of chaps I'd known in India, and we went places together, but I was impatient all the time for Bill to be there. I let them go, after a bit, and went to look at some of the places in the tourist folders. Some of those old places are pretty nice. There was one place built right over the water—a castle, I mean—on stone arches, so that the river flowed underneath. That was fine. It would have done very well for the Countess. Is that the kind of place she lives in?'

'No,' Grant said, thinking of the difference between Chenonceaux and Kentallen. 'She lives in a grim, flat, grey house with tiny windows and poky rooms and narrow stairs and a front door as welcoming as the exit of a laundry chute. It has two little turrets on the fourth-storey level, next the roof, and in Scotland that makes it a castle.'

'Sounds like a prison. Why does she stay?'

'A prison! No Prison Committee would consider it for a moment; questions would be asked in the House immediately about its lack of light, heating, sanitary conveniences, colour, beauty, space, and what not. She stays because she loves the place. I doubt if she can stay much longer, however. Death duties have been so heavy that she will have to sell.'

'But will anyone buy it?'

'Not to live in. But some speculator will buy it, and cut down the woods. The lead on the roof would probably fetch something; and they'd have to take the roof off anyhow to avoid paying tax on the house.'

'Hah! Dust-bowl stuff,' remarked Mr Cullen. 'It hasn't a moat, by any chance?'

'No. Why?'

'I must see a moat before I go back to OCAL.' And then, after a pause, 'I'm really very worried about Bill, Mr Grant.'

'Yes, it is certainly very odd.'

'That was nice of you,' Mr Cullen said unexpectedly.

'What was?'

'Not to say: "Don't you worry, he'll turn up all right!" I can hardly keep my hands off people who say: "Don't you worry, he'll turn up." I could strangle them.'

Moymore Hotel was a tiny version of Kentallen, without the turrets. But it was whitewashed and cheerful, and the trees behind it were coming into leaf. In the little flagged entrance-hall Mr Cullen hesitated.

'In Britain I notice people don't ask you up to their hotel bedroom. Would you like to wait in the sitting-room, perhaps?'

'Oh, no; I'll come up. I don't think we have any feeling about hotel bedrooms. It is probably just that our hotel sitting-rooms are so near our bedrooms that there is no need to go up, and so we don't suggest it. When a public lounge is a day's journey from your own room it is easier to take a guest with you, I suppose. That way you are at least in the same hemisphere.'

Mr Cullen had a front room, looking across the road to the fields and the river and the hills beyond. With his professional eye Grant noticed the log fire ready-laid in the hearth and the daffodils in the window: Moymore had standards; with his personal mind he was concerned for this Tad Cullen, who had interrupted his leave and come to the wilds of Caledonia to find the friend who meant so much to him. A foreboding that he could not shake off had grown in him with every step of the way to Moymore, and now it filled him to the point of nausea.

The young man took a letter-case from his travelling-bag and opened it on the dressing-table. It contained practically everything but the wherewithal for writing letters. Among the mess of papers, maps, travel folders and what not, there were two leather articles: an address-book and a pocket-book. From the pocket-book he took some photographs and riffled through the feminine smiles until he found what he was looking for.

'Here it is. I'm afraid it isn't a very good one. It's just a snapshot, you see. It was taken when a crowd of us were at the beach.'

Grant took the proffered piece of paper, almost reluctantly.

'That's—' Tad Cullen was beginning, lifting his arm to point.

'No, wait!' Grant said, stopping him. 'Let me see if I—if I recognise anyone.'

There were perhaps a dozen young men in the photograph, which had been taken on the verandah of some beach-house. They were clustered round the steps and draped over the rickety wooden railing in various stages of *deshabille*. Grant swept a swift glance over their laughing faces and was conscious of a great relief. There was no one there that he had ever—

And then he saw the man on the bottom step.

He was sitting with his feet pushed away from him into the sand, his eyes screwed up against the sun and his chin tilted back a little as if he had been in the act of turning to say something to the men behind. It was just so that his head had been tilted back against the pillow in Compartment B Seven on the morning of the 4th of March.

'Well?'

'Is that your friend?' Grant said, pointing to the man on the bottom step.

'Yes, that's Bill. How did you know? Have you met him somewhere, then?'

'I–I'm inclined to think that I have. But of course, on that photograph, I could hardly swear to it.'

'I don't want you to do any swearing. Just give me a general weather report. Just tell me roughly when and where you saw him and I'll track him down, don't you be in any doubt about it. Do you know where you met him? I mean, do you remember?'

'Oh, yes. I remember. I saw him in a compartment—a sleeping-berth compartment—of the London mail when it was running into Scoone early in the morning of the 4th of March. That was the train I came north on.'

'You mean Bill came here? To Scotland? What for?'

'I don't know.'

'Didn't he tell you? Did you talk to him?'

'No. I couldn't.'

'Why not?'

Grant put out his hand and pushed his companion gently backwards so that he sat down in the chair that was behind him.

'I couldn't because he was no longer alive.'

There was a short silence.

'I'm truly sorry, Cullen. I wish I could pretend to you that it might not be Bill, but short of going into a witness-box on oath I am prepared to back my belief that it is.'

After another little silence Cullen said: 'Why was he dead? What happened to him?'

'He had had a fair load of whisky and he fell backwards against the solid porcelain wash-basin. It fractured his skull.'

'Who said all this?'

'That was the finding of the coroner's court. In London.'

'In London? Why in London?'

'Because he had died, according to the post-mortem, very shortly after leaving Euston. And by English law, a sudden death is investigated by a coroner and a jury.'

'But all that's just—just supposition,' Cullen said, beginning to come alive and be angry. 'If he was alone, how can anyone tell what happened to him?'

'Because the English police are the most painstaking creatures as well as the most suspicious.'

'Police? There were police in on this thing?'

'Oh, assuredly. The police do the investigating and report in public to the coroner and his jury. In this case there had been the most exhaustive examination and tests. They knew in the end almost to a mouthful how much neat whisky he had drunk, and at what intervals before his—his death.'

'And that about his falling backwards—how could they know that?'

'They went prowling with microscopes. The oil and broken hair were still evident on the edge of the basin. And the skull injury was consistent with a backwards fall against just such an object.'

Cullen calmed down at this, but he looked disorientated.

'How do you know all this?' he asked, vaguely; and then with growing suspicion: 'How did you come to see him anyway?'

'When I was on my way out I came across the sleeping-car attendant trying to rouse him. The man thought he was just sleeping it off, because the whisky bottle had rolled all over the floor and the compartment smelt as if he had been making a night of it.'

This did not satisfy Tad Cullen. 'You mean that was the only time you saw him? Just for a moment, lying—lying dead there, and you could recognise him from a snapshot—a not very good snapshot—weeks later?'

'Yes. I was impressed by his face. Faces are my business; and in a way my hobby. I was interested in the way the slant of the eyebrows gave the face a reckless expression, even—even as it was, without any real expression whatever. And the interest was intensified in a way that was quite accidental.'

'What was that?' Cullen was not giving an inch.

'When I was having breakfast, in the Station Hotel at Scoone, I found that I had picked up by accident a newspaper that had been tumbled off the berth when the attendant was trying to waken him, and in the Stop Press—the blank space, you know—someone had been pencilling some lines of verse. "The beasts that talk, the streams that stand, the stones that walk, the singing sand—" then two blank lines, and then: "that guard the way to Paradise."

'That was what you advertised about,' Cullen said, his face growing momentarily blacker. 'What was it to you that you went to the trouble of advertising about it?'

'I wanted to know where the lines came from if they were lines from some book. If they were lines in the process of being made into a poem, then I wanted to know what the subject was.'

'Why? What should you care?'

'I had no choice in the matter. The thing ran round and round in my head. Do you know anyone called Charles Martin?'

'No, I don't. And don't change the subject.'

'I'm not changing the subject, oddly enough. Do me the kindness to think of it seriously for a moment. Have you ever, at any time, heard of or known a Charles Martin?'

'I've told you, no! I don't have to think. And of course you're changing the subject! What has Charles Martin got to do with this?'

'According to the police, the man who was found dead in Compartment B Seven was a French mechanic called Charles Martin.'

After a moment Cullen said: 'Look, Mr Grant, maybe I'm not very bright, but you're not making sense. What you're saying is that you saw Bill Kenrick lying dead in a compartment of a train, but he wasn't Bill Kenrick at all; he was a man called Martin.'

'No, what I'm saying is that the police believe him to be a man called Martin.'

'Well, I take it they have good grounds for their belief.'

'Excellent grounds. He had letters, and identity papers. Even better, his people have identified him.'

'They did! Then what have you been stringing me along for! There isn't any suggestion that that man was Bill! If the police are satisfied that the man was a Frenchman called Martin, why in thunder should you decide that he wasn't Martin at all but Bill Kenrick!'

'Because I'm the only person in the world who has seen both the man in B Seven and that snapshot.' Grant nodded at the photograph where it lay on the dressing-table.

This gave Cullen pause. Then he said: 'But that's a poor photograph. It can't convey much to someone who has never seen Bill.'

'It may be a poor photograph in the sense that it is a mere snapshot, but it is a very good likeness indeed.'

'Yes,' Cullen said slowly, 'it is.'

'Consider three things; three facts. One: Charles Martin's people had not seen him for years, and then they saw only a dead face; if you are told that your son has died, and no one suggests that there is any doubt as to identity, you see the face you expected to see. Two: the man known as Charles Martin was found dead on a train on the same day as Bill Kenrick was due to join you in Paris. Three: in his compartment there was a pencilled jingle about talking beasts and singing sands, a subject that on your own showing had interested Bill Kenrick.'

'Did you tell the police about the paper?'

'I tried to. They weren't interested. There was no mystery, you see. They knew who the man was, and how he died, and that was all that concerned them.'

'It might have interested them that he was writing verse in English.'

'Oh, no. There is no evidence that he wrote anything, or that the paper belonged to him at all. He may have picked it up somewhere.'

'The whole thing's crazy,' Cullen said, angry and bewildered.

'It's fantastic. But at the heart of all the whirling absurdity there is a small core of stillness.'

'Yes?'

'Yes. There is one small clear space on which one can stand while taking one's bearings.'

'What is that?'

'Your friend Bill Kenrick is missing. And out of a crowd of strange faces, I pick Bill Kenrick as a man I saw dead in a sleeping-compartment at Scoone on the morning of the 4th of March.'

Cullen thought this over. 'Yes,' he said drearily, 'I suppose that makes sense. I suppose it must be Bill. I suppose I knew all the time that something—something awful had happened. He would never have left me without word. He would have written or telephoned or something to say why he hadn't turned up on time. But what was he doing on a train to Scotland? What was he doing on a train anyhow?'

'How: anyhow?'

- 'If Bill wanted to go somewhere he would fly. He wouldn't take a train.'
- 'Lots of people take a night train because it saves time. You sleep and travel at the same time. The question is: why as Charles Martin?'
 - 'I think it's a case for Scotland Yard.'
 - 'I don't think the Yard would thank us.'
 - 'I'm not asking for their thanks,' Cullen said tartly, 'I'm instructing them to find out what happened to my buddy.'
 - 'I still don't think they would be interested.'
 - 'They'd better be!'
- 'You have no evidence at all that Bill Kenrick didn't duck of his own accord; that he isn't having a good time on his own until it is time to go back to OCAL.'
 - 'But he was found dead in a railway compartment!' Cullen said in a voice that was nearly a howl.
 - 'Oh, no. That was Charles Martin. About whom there is no mystery whatever.'
 - 'But you can identify Martin as Kenrick!'
- 'I can say, of course, that in my opinion that face in the snapshot is the face I saw in Compartment B Seven on the morning of March the 4th. Scotland Yard will say that I am entitled to my opinion, but that I am without doubt misled by a resemblance, since the man in Compartment B Seven is one Charles Martin, a mechanic, and a native of Marseilles, in the suburbs of which his parents still live.'
 - 'You're very smooth in the part of Scotland Yard, aren't you! All the same—'
- 'I ought to be. I've worked there for more years than I care to think about. I shall be going back there a week Monday, as soon as my holiday is over.'
 - 'You mean that you are Scotland Yard?'
- 'Not the whole of it. One of its minor props. Props in the support sense. I don't carry cards in my fishing clothes but if you come up to my host's house with me he will vouch for my genuineness.'
 - 'Oh. No. No, of course I believe you, Mr-er-
 - 'Inspector. But we'll stick to Mr, since I'm off duty.'
- 'I'm sorry if I was fresh. It just didn't occur to me—You see, you don't expect to meet Scotland Yard in real life. It's just something you read about. You don't expect them to—to—'
 - 'To go fishing.'
 - 'No, I guess you don't, at that. Only in books.'
- 'Well, now that you have accepted me as genuine, and you know that my version of Scotland Yard's reaction is not only accurate but straight from the horse's mouth, what are we going to do?'

When Laura heard next morning that Grant intended to go in to Scoone instead of spending the day on the river, she was indignant.

'But I've just made up a wonderful luncheon for you and Zoë,' she said. He was left with the impression that her dismay was rooted in some cause more valid than a miscalculated meal, but his mind was too busy with more important matters to analyse trivialities.

'There's a young American staying at Moymore who has come to ask my help about something. I thought that he might take my place on the river, if no one has any objection. He has fished quite a bit, he tells me. Perhaps Pat would like to show him the ropes.'

Pat had come to breakfast in a state so radiant that the glow of it could be felt clear across the table. It was the first day of the Easter holidays. He looked with interest when he heard his cousin's suggestion. There were few things in life that he enjoyed so much as showing someone something.

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'What's his name?' he asked.
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'Tad Cullen.'

'What's "Tad"?'

'I don't know. Short for Theodore, perhaps.'

'M—m—m,' said Pat doubtfully.

'He's a flyer.'

'Oh,' said Pat, his brow clearing. 'I thought maybe with a name like that he was a professor.'

'No. He flies to and fro across Arabia.'

'Arabia!' said Pat, rolling the R so that the mundane Scots breakfast table scintillated with reflections of the jewelled East. Between modern transport and ancient Bagdad, Tad Cullen seemed to have satisfactory credentials. Pat would 'show him' with pleasure.

'Of course Zoë gets first choice of places to fish,' Pat said.

If Grant had imagined that Pat's infatuation would take the form of blushing silences and a mooning adoration, he was wrong. Pat's only sign of surrender was the constant interjection of 'me and Zoë' into his conversation; and it was to be observed that the personal pronoun still came first.

So Grant borrowed the car after breakfast and went down to Moymore to tell Tad Cullen that a small boy with red hair and a green kilt would be waiting for him, with all appliances and means to boot, by the swing bridge across the Turlie. He himself would be back from Scoone in time to join them on the river some time in the afternoon, he hoped.

'I'd like to come with you, Mr Grant,' Cullen said. 'Have you got a line on this thing? Is that why you're going in to Scoone this morning?'

'No. It's to look for a line that I'm going in. There's not a thing you can do just now, so you might as well have a day on the river.'

'All right, Mr Grant. You're the boss. What's your young friend's name?'

'Pat Rankin,' Grant said, and drove away to Scoone.

He had spent most of last night lying awake with his eyes on the ceiling, letting the patterns in his mind slip and fade into each other like trick camera work in a film. Constantly the patterns materialised, and broke, and dissolved, never the same for two moments together. He lay supine and let them dance their endless slow interlacing; taking no part in their gyrations; as detached as if they were a display of Northern Lights.

It was that way his mind worked best. It would also work the other way, of course. Work very well. In problems involving a time-place sequence for instance. In matters where A was at a spot X at 5.30 p.m. on the umpteenth inst, Grant's mind worked with the tidiness of a calculating machine. But in an affair where motive was all, he sat back and let his mind loose on the problem. Presently, if he left it alone, it would throw up the pattern that he needed.

He still had no idea why Bill Kenrick had journeyed to the north of Scotland when he should have been travelling to Paris to meet his friend; still less had he any idea why he should have been travelling with another man's papers. But he was beginning to have an idea as to why Bill Kenrick developed his sudden interest in Arabia. Cullen, looking at the world from his limited, flyer's point of view, had thought of that interest in terms of flying routes. But Grant was sure that the interest had other origins. On Cullen's own showing, Kenrick had exhibited none of the usual signs of 'nerves'. It was unlikely that his obsession with the route he flew had anything to do with weather in any of its forms. Somewhere, sometime, on one of those flights over that 'damned dreary' route, Kenrick had found something that interested him. And that interest had begun on an occasion when he had been blown far off his course by one of the dust-storms that haunted the interior of Arabia. He had come back from that experience 'concussed'. 'Not listening to what was said to him.' 'Still back there.'

So this morning Grant was going in to Scoone to find out what might possibly have interested Bill Kenrick in the interior of that bleak and stony immensity; in the desert and forbidding half-continent that was Arabia. And for that, of course, he was going to Mr Tallisker. Whether it was the rateable value of a cottage or the composition of lava that one wanted to be enlightened about, one went to Mr Tallisker.

The Public Library in Scoone was deserted at this hour of the morning and he found Mr Tallisker having a doughnut and a cup of coffee. Grant thought the doughnut an endearingly childish and robust choice for a man who looked as though he lived on gaufrettes and China tea with lemon. Mr Tallisker was delighted to see Grant, asked how his study of the Islands was progressing, listened with interest to Grant's heretic account of that Paradise, and was helpful about his new search. Arabia? Oh, yes, they had a whole shelf of books about the country. Almost as many people wrote books about Arabia as about the Hebrides. There was, too, if Mr Tallisker

might be permitted to say so, the same tendency to idealise the subject in its devotees.

'You think that, boiled down to plain fact, they are both just windy deserts.'

Oh, no; not entirely. That was being a little—wholesale. Mr Tallisker had had much happiness and beauty from the Islands. But the tendency to idealise a primitive people was perhaps the same in each case. And here was the shelf of books on the subject, and he would leave Mr Grant to study them at his leisure.

The books were in a reference room, and there was no other reader there. The door closed on the silence and he was left with his search. He went through the row of books very much as he had gone through the row about the Hebrides in the sitting-room at Clune, gutting each book with a swift practised eye. The range was much the same as it had been in the earlier case: all the way from the sentimentalists to the scientists. The only difference was that in this case some of the books were classics, as befitted a classic subject.

If Grant had had any last lingering doubt that the man in B Seven was Bill Kenrick, it went when he found that the desert part of south-eastern Arabia, the Empty Quarter, was called the Rub'al-Khali.

So that was what 'robbing the Caley' had been!

After that he devoted his interest to the Empty Quarter, picking each book from the shelf, flipping through the pages on this one region, and putting it back again to go on to the next. And presently a phrase caught his eye. 'Inhabited by monkeys.' Monkeys, said his mind. Talking beasts. He turned the page back to see what the paragraph had been talking about.

It was talking about Wabar.

Wabar, it seemed, was the Atlantis of Arabia. The fabled city of Ad ibn Kin'ad. Somewhere in the time between legend and history it had been destroyed by fire for its sins. For it had been rich and sinful beyond the power of words to express. Its palaces had housed the most beautiful concubines and its stables the most perfect horses in the world, the one no less finely decked than the other. It stood in country so fertile that one had only to reach out a hand to pluck the fruits of the soil. There was infinite leisure to sin old sins and devise new ones. So destruction had come on the city. It had come in a night, with cleansing fire. And now Wabar, the fabled city, was a cluster of ruins; guarded by the shifting sands, by cliffs of stone that for ever changed place and form; and inhabited by a monkey race and by evil jinns. No one could approach the place because the jinns blew dust-storms in the faces of those who sought it.

That was Wabar.

And no one, it seemed, had ever found the ruins although every Arabian explorer had looked for them, openly or secretly. Indeed, no two explorers agreed as to which part of Arabia the legend referred to. Grant went back through the various volumes, using the magic key, the word Wabar, and found that each authority had his own pet theory, and that the argued sites lay as far apart as Oman and the Yemen. None of the writers, he noticed, attempted to belittle or discount the legend as palliation of their failure; the story was universal in Arabia and constant in its form, and sentimentalist and scientist alike believed that it had its basis in fact. It had been every explorer's dream to be the discoverer of Wabar, but the sands and the jinns and the mirages had guarded it well.

'It is probable,' wrote one of the greatest, 'that when the fabled city is at last found it will be by no striving or calculation but by accident.'

By accident.

By a flyer blown off his course by a dust-storm?

Was that what Bill Kenrick had seen when he came out of the solid brown cloud of sand that had blinded and buffeted him? Empty palaces in the sand? Was that what he had gone out of his way to look for—perhaps to look *at*—when he 'began to come in late as a habit'?

He had said nothing after that first experience. And that, if what he had seen was a city in the sand, was understandable. He would have been teased about it: teased about mirages, and one over the eight, and what not. Even if any of the OCAL boys had ever heard the legend—and in so shifting, so easy-come a crowd it was unlikely—they would still have teased him about wish-fathered ideas. So Bill, who wrote those tight-closed M's and N's and was 'just a bit cagey', said nothing and went back to have another look. Went back again and again. Either because he wanted to find the place he had seen, or to look at a place he had already pin-pointed.

He studied maps. He read books about Arabia. And then—?

Then he decided to come to England.

He had arranged to go to Paris with Tad Cullen. But instead he wanted a little time by himself in England. He had no people in England. He had not been in England for years, and according to Cullen had never seemed homesick for the place nor written to anyone there in any kind of regular correspondence. He had been brought up by an aunt when his parents were killed and she too was now dead. He had never until then had any desire to go back to England.

Grant sat back and let the stillness fall round him. He could almost hear the dust coming to rest. Year after year the dust falling in the quiet. Like Wabar.

Bill Kenrick came to England. And about three weeks later, when he is due to meet his friend in Paris, he turns up in Scotland as Charles Martin.

Grant could imagine why he wanted to come to England, but why the masquerade? Why the flying visit to the North?

Whom was he going to visit as Charles Martin?

He could have paid that flying visit and still have met his friend in Paris on the appointed date if it had not been for the accident of his tipsy fall. He could have interviewed someone in the Highlands and then flown from Scoone to meet his friend at the Hotel St Jacques for dinner.

But why as Charles Martin?

Grant put the books back on their shelf with an approving pat that he had never wasted on the Hebrides selection, and went to call on Mr Tallisker in his little office. He had at least got his line on Kenrick. He knew how to cross his trail.

'Who would you say was the greatest authority on Arabia in England today?' he asked Mr Tallisker.

Mr Tallisker waved his beribboned pince-nez and smiled in a deprecating way. There were what might be termed a swarm of successors to Thomas and Philby and the other great names, he said, but he supposed that only Heron Lloyd ranked as a really great authority. It was possible that he, Mr Tallisker, was prejudiced in Lloyd's favour because he was the only one of the crowd who wrote

English that was literature, but it was true that apart from his gifts as a writer he had stature and integrity and a great reputation. He had done some spectacular journeys in the course of his various explorations, and had considerable standing among the Arabs.

Grant thanked Mr Tallisker and went away to look up Who's Who. He wanted Heron Lloyd's address.

Then he went to have a meal; and instead of going to the Caledonian, which was convenient and sufficiently bestarred, he obeyed an obscure impulse and walked to the other side of the town so that he could eat where he had eaten breakfast with the shade of B Seven on that dark morning only a few weeks ago.

There was no half-fit gloom in the dining-room today; the place was starched and shining, silver, glass and linen. There was even a shirt-front where a head waiter hovered. But there was also Mary; calm and comfortable and plump as she had been that morning. He remembered how in need of soothing and reassurance he had been, and could hardly believe that that tortured and exhausted creature could have been himself.

He sat down at the same table, near the screens in front of the service door, and Mary came to take his order and to ask how the fishing on the Turlie was these days.

'How did you know I was fishing the Turlie?'

'You were with Mr Rankin when you came in for breakfast, off the train.'

Off the train. He had come off the train after that night of conflict and suffering; that loathsome night. He had come off the train, leaving B Seven dead there with a casual glance and a passing moment of regret. But B Seven had paid back a hundred-fold that moment of easy compassion. B Seven had come with him and in the end had saved him. It was B Seven who had sent him to the Islands, on that mad, cold, blown search for nothing. In that strange absurd limbo he had done all those things that he could never have done elsewhere; he had laughed till the tears ran, he had danced, he had let himself be flung about like a leaf from one empty horizon to the next, he had sung, he had sat still and looked. And he had come back a whole man. He owed B Seven more than he could ever repay.

He thought about Bill Kenrick while he had his luncheon; the young man who had had no roots. Had he been lonely in his unattached life, or just free? And if free, was it a swallow's freedom, or an eagle's? A sun-seeking skimming, or a soaring lordliness?

At least he had had a trait that in all climes and ages has been both rare and endearing: he was the man of action who was also by instinct a poet. It was what distinguished him from the light-come crowds of OCAL employees who span their airy patterns across the continents as unthinking as mosquitoes. It was what distinguished him from the milling five-o'clock crowds in a London railway station to whom adventure was half-a-crown each way. If the dead boy in B Seven had been neither a Sidney nor a Grenfell, he had at least been of their kind.

And for that Grant loved him.

'You know,' said that voice in him, 'if you don't take care you'll develop a "thing" about Bill Kenrick.'

'I've got it already,' he said cheerfully; and the voice retired in a defeated silence.

He over-tipped Mary and went away to book two seats on the morning plane to London. He had still more than a week of holiday to come and the Turlie still swarmed with fish, beautiful silver clean-run fighting fish, but he had other business. Since yesterday afternoon he had only one business: Bill Kenrick.

He had qualms about that air journey to London, but not very serious qualms. He could hardly recognise, when he looked back at him, that demon-ridden frightened creature who had stepped down on to Scoone platform from the London mail less than a month ago. All that was left of that deplorable object was a slight fear of being afraid. The terror itself was no longer there.

He bought enough sweets for Patrick to keep him sick for three months on end, and drove back to the hills. He was afraid that the sweets were a little too elegant to please Patrick entirely—a little too 'jessie-like' perhaps? — since Pat's avowed favourites were something in Mrs Mair's window labelled Ogo-Pogo Eyes. But Laura would no doubt dole out the Scoone ones in driblets anyway.

He halted the car above the river, half-way between Moymore and Scoone, and went down across the moor to look for Tad Cullen. It was still early afternoon and he would not yet have finished his after-luncheon spell on the river.

He had not yet begun it. As Grant came to the edge of the moor and looked down at the river's immediate hollow, he saw below him in the mid-distance a small group of three persons, idle and relaxed on the bank. Zoë was propped in her favourite position against a rock, and on either side of her, on a level with her crossed feet and gazing at her with an unwavering attention, were her two followers: Pat Rankin and Tad Cullen. Looking at them, amused and indulgent, Grant became aware that Bill Kenrick had done him a final service for which he had not yet had credit. Bill Kenrick had saved him from falling in love with Zoë Kentallen.

A few more hours would have done it. A few more hours in her uninterrupted company, and he would have been involved past recovery. Bill Kenrick had intervened just in time.

It was Pat who saw him first and came to meet him and bring him back to the company as children and dogs do to those of whom they approve. Zoë tilted her head back to watch him come and said: 'You haven't missed anything, Alan Grant. No one has had a nibble all day. Would you like to take my rod for a little? Perhaps a change of rhythm will fetch them.'

Grant said that he would like that very much, since his time for fishing was running out.

'You have still a week to catch everything in the river,' she said.

Grant wondered how she had known that. 'No,' he said, 'I am going back to London tomorrow morning,' and for the first time saw Zoë react to a stimulus as an adult would. The instant regret on her face was as vivid as that on Pat's, but unlike Pat she controlled and removed it. She said in her polite gentle voice how sorry she was, but her face no longer showed any emotion. It was her fairy-tale face again; the Hans Andersen illustration.

Before he could consider this phenomenon, Tad Cullen said: 'Can I come back with you, Mr Grant? To London.'

'I meant you to. I've booked two seats on the morning plane.'

In the end Grant took the rod that Tad Cullen was using—a spare one from Clune—so that they could go down river together and talk. But Zoë made no motion to continue her fishing.

'I've had enough,' she said, unjointing her rod. 'I think I shall go back to Clune and write some letters.'

Pat stood irresolute, still like a friendly dog between two allegiances, and then said: 'I'm going back with Zoë.'

He said it, Grant thought, almost as if he were championing her instead of merely accompanying her; as if he had joined an Unfair-To-Zoë movement. But since no one could ever think of being unfair to Zoë, his attitude was surely unnecessary.

From the rock where he sat with Tad Cullen to give him the news he watched the two figures grow small across the moor, and wondered a little at that sudden withdrawal, at the dispirited air that hung about her progress. She looked like a discouraged child, tired and trailing homeward unexpectant. Perhaps the thought of David, her husband, had suddenly drowned her. That was the way with grief: it left you alone for months together until you thought that you were cured, and then without warning it blotted out the sunlight.

'But that wouldn't be much to get excited about, would it?' Tad Cullen was saying.

'What wouldn't?'

'This ancient city you're talking about. Would anyone get all that excited about it? I mean, about a few ruins. Ruins are two a nickel in the world nowadays.'

'Not these, they aren't,' Grant said, forgetting Zoë. 'The man who found Wabar would make history.'

'I thought when you said he had found something important you were going to say munition works in the desert or something like that.'

'Now that really is something that is two for a nickel!'

'What?'

'Secret munition plants. No one who found one of those would be a celebrity.'

Tad's ears pricked. 'A celebrity? You mean the man who found this place would be a celebrity?'

'I've already said so.'

'No. You just said he would make history.'

'True. Too true,' Grant said. 'The terms are not synonymous any more. Yes, he would be a celebrity. Tutankhamen's tomb would be nothing to it.'

'And you think Bill will have gone to see this fellow, this Lloyd guy?'

'If not to him, then to someone else in that line. He wanted to talk to someone who would take what he had to tell as a serious matter; I mean, who would not just tease him about seeing things. And he wanted to meet someone who would be personally interested and excited by his news. Well, he would do just what I did. He would go to a museum, or a library, or perhaps even to one of the Information departments at the big stores, and find out who the best-known English explorer of Arabia happened to be. He would probably be given a choice, since librarians and curators are pedantic people and Information departments subject to the law of libel, but Lloyd is head-and-shoulders above the others because he writes almost as well as he explores. He is the household word of the bunch, so to speak. So the chances are twenty to one that Bill would choose Lloyd.'

'So we find out when and where he saw Lloyd and pick up his trail from there.'

'Yes. We also find out whether he went to see Lloyd as Charles Martin or under his own name.'

'Why would he go as Charles Martin?'

'Who knows? You said that he was a little cagey. He may have wanted to keep back his connection with OCAL. Are OCAL strict about their routes and schedules? It may be as simple as that.'

Cullen sat in silence for a little, making a pattern in the turf with the butt of the fishing-rod. Then he said:

'Mr Grant, don't think I'm being dramatic or—or sensational or silly, but you don't think, do you, that Bill could have been bumped off?'

'He could have been, of course. Murder does happen. Even clever murders. But the chances against it are very long.'

'Why?'

'Well, for one thing it has passed a police investigation. In spite of all the detective stories to the contrary the Criminal Investigation Department really is a highly efficient organisation. By far the most efficient organisation, if you'll accept a slightly prejudiced opinion, that exists in this country today—or in any other country, in any period.'

'But the police have already been wrong about one thing.'

'About his identity, you mean. Yes, but they can hardly be blamed for that.'

'You mean because the set-up was perfect. Well, what's to hinder the other set-up being as perfect as the Charles Martin one?'

'Nothing, of course. Clever murders, as I say, do happen. But it is much easier to forge an identity than to get away with murder. How do you think it was done? Someone came in and slugged him after the train left Euston, and arranged it to look like a fall?'

'Yes.'

'But no one visited B Seven after the train left Euston. B Eight heard him come back shortly after the attendant had done his round, and close his door. After that there was no conversation.'

'It doesn't need conversation to slug a man on the back of the head.'

'No, but it does need opportunity. The chances against opening that door and finding the occupant in the right position for slugging him are astronomical. It's not an easy place to take a swing at anyone, even choosing your own time: a sleeping compartment. Anyone with lethal intentions would have to come into the compartment: it couldn't be done from the corridor. It couldn't be done when the victim was in bed. And it couldn't be done with the victim facing you; and he would face round as soon as he was aware that there was someone in the compartment. Therefore it could only be done after preliminary conversation. And B Eight says there was no conversation or visiting. B Eight is the kind of woman who "can't sleep on a train". She makes up her mind about that beforehand, and every little sound and squeak and rattle is welcomed as a sign of her suffering. She is usually dead asleep and snoring by about half-past two; but long before that time Bill Kenrick was dead.'

'Did she hear him fall?'

'She heard a "thump", it seems, and thought that he was taking down a suitcase. He had no suitcase, of course, that would make a thump in being handled. Did Bill speak French, by the way?'

'Well enough to get by.'

- 'Avec moi.'
- 'Yes. About that. Why?'
- 'I just wondered. It looks as if he planned to spend a night somewhere.'
- 'In Scotland, you mean?'
- 'Yes. The Testament and the French novel. And yet he didn't speak French.'
- 'Perhaps the Scotch party didn't either.'
- 'No. Scotch parties usually don't. But if he planned to spend a night somewhere he couldn't meet you that day in Paris.'
- 'Oh, being a day late wouldn't worry Bill. He could have sent me a wire on the 4th.'
- 'Yes...I wish I could think of his reason for blacking himself all over.'
- 'Blacking himself?'
- 'Yes. Dressing the part so completely. Why did he want someone to think that he was French?'
- 'I can't think why anyone would want anyone to think they were French,' Mr Cullen said. 'What are you hoping from this Lloyd guy?'
- 'I'm hoping that it was Lloyd who saw him away at Euston. They were talking about the Rub'al-Khali, remember. What sounded to Old Yughourt's ear—quite typically—as "rob the Caley".'
 - 'Does this Lloyd live in London?'
 - 'Yes. In Chelsea.'
 - 'I hope he is at home.'
- 'I hope so indeed. Now I am going to have a last hour with the Turlie, and if you can bear just to sit and think the problem over for a little, then perhaps you would come back to supper at Clune and meet the Rankin family?'
- 'That would be fine,' Tad said. 'I haven't said goodbye to the Countess. I'm a convert to Countesses. Would you say that the Countess is typical of your aristocracy, Mr Grant?'
 - 'In the sense of having all the qualities of the type, she is indeed typical,' Grant said, picking his way down the bank to the water.
- He fished until the level light warned him that it was evening, but he caught nothing. This was a result that neither surprised nor disappointed him. His thoughts were elsewhere. He no longer saw Bill Kenrick's dead face in the swirling water, but Bill Kenrick's personality was all round him. Bill Kenrick possessed his mind.

He reeled in for the last time with a sigh, not for his empty bag or his farewell to the Turlie, but because he was no nearer to finding a reason why Bill Kenrick should have blacked himself all over.

'I'm glad I had this chance of seeing this island,' Tad said as they walked up to Clune. 'It's not a bit the way I imagined it.'

From his tone Grant deduced that he had imagined it as a sort of Wabar; inhabited by monkeys and jinns.

'I wish it had been a happier way of seeing it,' he said. 'You must come back some day and fish in peace.'

Tad grinned a little shamefacedly and rubbed his tumbled hair. 'Oh, I guess it will always be Paris for me. Or Vienna, maybe. When you spend your days in godforsaken little towns you look forward to the bright lights.'

'Well, we do have bright lights in London.'

'Yes. Maybe I'll have another smack at London. London's all right.'

Laura came to the door as they arrived and said: 'Alan, what's this I hear about—' and then noticed his companion. 'Oh. You must be Tad. Pat says you don't believe that there *are* any fish in the Turlie. How d'you do. I'm so glad you've come up. Go in and Pat will show you where to wash, and then come and join us in a drink before supper.' She summoned Pat, who was hovering, and passed the visitor into his charge, blocking the way firmly on any advance by her cousin. When she had got rid of Mr Cullen she turned again to her charge. 'Alan, you're *not* going back to town tomorrow?'

'But I'm cured, Lalla,' he said, thinking that that was what disturbed her.

'Well, what if you are? There is still more than a week of your leave, and the Turlie better than it has been for seasons. You can't give up all that just to get some young man out of some hole that he's got himself into.'

'Tad Cullen's not in any hole. I'm not being quixotic, if that is what you're thinking. I'm going away tomorrow because that is the thing I want to do.' He was going to add, 'I just can't wait to get away', but even with an intimate like Laura that might lead to misunderstanding.

'But we are all so happy, and things were—' she broke off. 'Oh, well. Nothing I can say will make you change your mind. I ought to know that. Nothing has ever made you deviate by a hair's breadth from any line that you once set your mind on. You've always been a damned Juggernaut.'

'A damned horrible metaphor,' he said. 'Couldn't you make it a bullet or a bee-line or something equally undeviating but less destructive?'

She put her arm through his, friendly and a little amused. 'But you are destructive, darling.' And as he began a protest: 'All in the very kindest and most lethal way imaginable. Come and have a drink. You look as if you could do with one.'

Even the undeviating Grant, of course, had his unsure moments.

- 'You fool!' said that inner voice, as he was climbing into the London plane at Scoone. 'Giving up even a day of your precious leave to hunt will-o'-the-wisps.'
 - 'I'm not hunting any will-o'-the-wisps. I just want to know what happened to Bill Kenrick.'
 - 'And what is Bill Kenrick to you that you should give up even an hour of your free time for him?'
 - 'I'm interested in him. If you want to know, I like him.'
 - 'You don't know a thing about him. You have made a god in your own image, and are busy worshipping it.'
 - 'I know guite a lot about him. I've listened to Tad Cullen.'
 - 'A prejudiced witness.'
- 'A nice boy, which is more important. The Cullen boy had a wide choice of friends in an organisation like OCAL and he chose Bill Kenrick.'
 - 'Lots of nice boys have chosen criminal friends.'
 - 'Come to that, I've known some nice criminals.'
 - 'Yeah? How many? And how many minutes of your leave would you give up to a criminal type?'
 - 'Not thirty seconds. But the Kenrick boy is no criminal.'
 - 'A complete set of another man's papers isn't a particularly law-abiding thing to be carrying round, is it?'
 - 'I'll find out about that presently. Meanwhile shut up and leave me alone.'
 - 'Huh! Stumped, aren't you!'
 - 'Go away.'
 - 'Sticking your neck out for an unknown boy at your age!'
 - 'Who's sticking his neck out?'
- 'You didn't have to do this plane journey at all. You could have gone back by train or by road. But no, you had to arrange to have yourself shut into a box. A box without a window or a door that will open. A box you can't escape from. A tight, silent, enclosed, sealed—'
 - 'Shut up!'
- 'Huh! You're breathing short already! In about ten minutes the thing will hit you for six. You ought to have your head examined, Alan Grant, you certainly ought to have your head examined.'
 - 'There is one part of my cranial equipment that is still in admirable working order.'
 - 'What is that?'
 - 'My teeth.'
 - 'You planning to chew something? That's no cure.'
 - 'No. I plan to grit them.'

And whether it was because he had thumbed his nose at the devil or whether it was that Bill Kenrick stood beside him all the way, Grant made that journey in peace. Tad Cullen slumped into the seat beside him and fell instantly asleep. Grant closed his eyes and let the patterns form in his mind and dissolve and fade and form anew.

Why had Bill Kenrick blacked himself all over?

Whom was he trying to fool?

Why had it been necessary to fool anyone?

As they were circling to land Tad woke up and without looking out of the window began to pull up his tie and smooth his hair. Apparently some sixth sense in a flyer's brain kept tally of speed, distance and angle, even when he was unconscious.

- 'Well,' said Tad. 'Back to the lights of London and the old Westmorland.'
- 'You don't have to go back to your hotel,' Grant said. 'I can give you a bed.'
- "That's very kind of you, Mr Grant, and I appreciate it. But I don't have to put your wife—or—or whoever it is—'
- 'My housekeeper.'
- 'I don't have to put your housekeeper about.' He slapped his pocket. 'I'm loaded.'
- 'Even after—what was it? a fortnight in Paris? I congratulate you.'
- 'Oh, well. I don't think Paris is what it used to be. Or perhaps it was just that I missed Bill. Anyhow, I don't need to fuss anyone making beds for me, thanks all the same. And if you're going to be busy you don't want me around. But you'll not shut me out of this thing, will you? You'll keep me "with you", as Bill says. Said, I mean.'
- 'I will indeed, Tad, I will indeed. I put a fly on a line in a hotel in Oban and fished you out of the white population of the world. I'm certainly not going to throw you back now.'

Tad grinned. 'I suppose you know what you're talking about. When are you going to see this Lloyd guy?'

'This evening if he is at home. The worst of explorers is that if they are not exploring they are lecturing; so he may be anywhere between China and Peru. What startled you?'

'How did you know I was startled?'

- 'My dear Tad, your fresh and open countenance was never made for either poker or diplomacy.'
- 'No, it was just that you chose two places that Bill always chose. He used to say that, "From China to Peru".'

'He did? He seems to have known his Johnson.'

'Johnson?'

'Yes. Samuel Johnson. It's a quotation.'

'Oh. Oh, I see.' Tad looked faintly abashed.

'If you're still doubtful about me, Tad Cullen, you had better come along the Embankment with me now and let some of my colleagues vouch for me.'

Mr Cullen's fair skin went a deep red. 'I'm sorry. Just for a moment there I—. It did sound as if you had known Bill. You'll have to forgive me being suspicious, Mr Grant. I'm all at sea, you know. I don't know a soul in this country. I just have to take people as they come. On face value, I mean. Of *course* I'm not doubtful about you. I'm too grateful to you to be able to find words to describe how grateful I am. You have to believe that.'

'Of course I believe it. I was only teasing you, and I had no right to. It would be unintelligent of you not to be suspicious. Here is my address and telephone number. I'll telephone you as soon as I've seen Lloyd.'

'You don't think I should come with you, perhaps?'

'No. I think a deputation of two would be a little excessive for so slight an occasion. What time will you be at the Westmorland tonight to take a phone call?'

'Mr Grant, I'll be sitting with my hand on that thing until you call.'

'Better eat some time. I'll call you at half-past eight.'

'Okay. Half-past eight.'

London was a misty grey with scarlet trimmings, and Grant looked at it with affection. Army nurses used to have that rig-out; that grey and scarlet. And in some ways London gave one the same sense of grace and power that went with that Sister's uniform. The dignity, the underlying kindness beneath the surface indifference, the respect-worthiness that compensated for the lack of pretty frills. He watched the red buses making the grey day beautiful, and blessed them. What a happy thing it was that London buses should be scarlet. In Scotland the buses were painted that most miserable of all colours: blue. A colour so miserable that it was a synonym for depression. But the English, God bless them, had had gayer ideas.

He found Mrs Tinker turning out the spare bedroom. There was not the slightest need for anyone to turn out the spare bedroom, but Mrs Tinker obtained the same pleasure from turning out a room that other people get from writing a symphony, or winning a cup at golf, or swimming the Channel. She belonged to that numerous species once succinctly described by Laura as 'the kind of woman who washes her front doorstep every day and her own hair every six weeks'.

She came to the door of the spare bedroom when she heard the key in the lock, and said: 'Well, now! And not a bite in the house! Why didn't you let me know you was comin' back from foreign parts before your time?'

'It's all right, Tink. I don't want a meal anyhow. I've just looked in to leave my luggage. Get in something and leave it for me when you go, so that there is something for me to eat tonight.'

Mrs Tinker went home every night, partly because she had to see to the evening meal of someone she referred to as 'Tinker', and partly because Grant had always liked to have the flat to himself in the evenings. Grant had never seen 'Tinker', and Mrs Tinker's only connection with him seemed to consist of this matter of an evening meal and some marriage lines. Her real life and interest was in 19 Tenby Court, S.W.1.

'Any telephones?' Grant asked, thumbing through the telephone pad.

'Miss Hallard telephoned to say ring her up and dine with her as soon as you were back.'

'Oh. Did the new play go well? What were the notices like?'

'Stinkers.'

'All of them?'

'Every one I seen, anyway.'

In the days of her freedom, before Tinker, Mrs Tinker had been a theatre dresser. Indeed, if it had not been for this ritual of the evening meal it was likely that she would still be dressing someone each evening in W.1 or W.C.2 instead of turning out spare bedrooms in S.W.1. Her interest in theatre matters was therefore that of an initiate.

'Have you seen the play?'

'Not me. It's one of them plays what means something else. You know. She keeps a china dog on the mantelpiece, but it isn't a china dog at all, it's 'er ex-husband, and 'e breaks the dog, the new boy-friend does, and she goes mad. Not *gets* mad, you know; *goes* mad. 'Ighbrow. But I suppose if you want to be a Dame you got to act 'ighbrow plays. What was you thinkin' of 'avin' for your supper?'

'I wasn't thinking."

'I could leave a nice bit of fish poachin' over some hot water for you.'

'Not fish, if you love me. I've eaten enough fish in the last month to last me a lifetime. As long as it isn't fish or mutton I don't mind what it is.'

'Well, it's too late now to get any kidneys out of Mr Bridges, but I'll see what I can do. You 'ad a good 'oliday?'

'A wonderful, wonderful holiday.'

'That's good. You bin and put on a little weight, I'm glad to see. And you needn't slap your stomach in that doubtful way neither. A little bit of weight never 'urt no one. It don't do to be as thin as a rail. You don't 'ave no reserves.'

She hung around while Grant changed into his best town suit, doling out bits of gossip as they happened to occur to her. Then he shooed her back to her piece of self-indulgence with the spare bedroom, dealt with the small businesses that had piled up in his absence, and went out into the calm of the early April evening. He went round to the garage, answered questions about his fishing, listened to three fishing stories that he had listened to before he set out for the Highlands a month ago, and reclaimed the little two-seater that he used when on his own business.

Number 5 Britt Lane took some finding. In this huddle of old houses all kinds of adaptation and conditioning had taken place.

Stables had become cottages, kitchen wings had become houses, odd storeys had become maisonettes. Number 5 Britt Lane seemed to be just a number on a gate. The gate was in a brick wall, and its iron-studded oak seemed to Grant a little affected in so unpretentious a stretch of ordinary London brick. However, it was solid and in itself unexceptional, and it opened easily when asked to. It opened on to what had been a kitchen yard when Number 5 had been merely the back wing of a house in another street altogether. Now the yard was a small paved court with a fountain playing in the middle of it, and the one-time wing was a small flat stucco house of three storeys, painted cream with green window-sashes. As Grant crossed the little court to the doorway he noticed that the paving was of tiles, some of them old and many of them beautiful. The fountain too was beautiful. He mentally applauded Heron Lloyd for not having replaced the plain London electric bell-push by some more aesthetic piece of fancy-work; it augured a good taste that the inappropriate gate had left open to question.

The interior of the house, too, had the Arab bareness and space without any suggestion that a piece of the East had been transported to London. Beyond the figure of the manservant who answered his ring, he could see the clean walls and the rich carpet; an idiom adapted, not a décor transposed. His respect for Heron Lloyd mounted.

The manservant appeared to be Arab; an Arab of the towns, plumpish, lively-eyed and good-mannered. He listened to Grant's inquiry and asked in a gentle too-correct English if he had an appointment. Grant said no, but that he would not detain Mr Lloyd more than a moment. Mr Lloyd could be of some help in giving information connected with Arabia.

'If you will come in, please, and wait for a moment, I ask.'

He ushered Grant into a tiny room just inside the front door which, judging from its limited space and scanty furnishing, was used for just this purpose of waiting. He supposed that someone like Heron Lloyd must be used to strangers appearing on his doorstep to claim his interest or help. Even perhaps just to ask for his autograph. A realisation that made his own intrusion less deplorable.

Mr Lloyd had not debated his desirability very long, it seemed, for the man was back in a few moments.

'Will you come, please? Mr Lloyd will be very happy to see you.'

A formula, but such a pleasant formula. How good manners did cushion life, he thought as he followed the man up the narrow stairs and into the big room that occupied the whole of the first floor.

'Mr Grant, *hadji*,' said the man, standing aside to let him come. Grant caught the word and thought: That is the first piece of chichi: Englishmen don't make the pilgrimage to Mecca, surely.

Watching Heron Lloyd as he was made welcome, Grant wondered whether he had first thought of going to desert Arabia because he looked like a desert Arab, or whether he had come to look like a desert Arab after years in desert Arabia. Lloyd was the Arab of the desert idealised to the nth. He was, Grant thought with amusement, the Arab of the circulating libraries. It was across the saddle of Arabs like Heron Lloyd that blameless matrons in the Crescents and Drives and Avenues had been carried off to a fate worse than death. The black eyes, the lean brown face, the white teeth, the whip-lash body, the delicate hands, the graceful movements: it was all there, straight out of Page Seventeen of Miss Tilly Tally's latest (two hundred and fifty-four thousand, new printing next week). Grant had to remind himself forcibly that he must not judge on looks.

For this man had done journeys that had made history in the world of exploration, and had written about them in English which, even if a little lush (Grant had bought a copy of his latest in Scoone yesterday afternoon) was nevertheless recognisable as literature. Heron Lloyd was no parlour sheik.

Lloyd was wearing orthodox London clothes and a manner to match. If one had never heard of him one would accept him as a Londoner of the well-to-do professional classes. One of the slightly more flamboyant classes, perhaps; an actor, or conceivably a Harley Street consultant or a Society photographer; but a Londoner of the orthodox professions, when all was considered.

'Mr Grant,' he said, shaking hands. 'Mahmoud says that I can be of service to you.'

His voice surprised Grant. It had no body and a faintly querulous tone that had nothing to do with the sense of the words or their mood. He took a box of cigarettes from the low coffee table and offered them. He did not smoke himself, he said, because he had adopted Mohammedan customs during his long life in the East, but he could recommend the cigarettes if Grant cared to try something that tasted a little out of the ordinary.

Grant took the cigarette, as he took every new experience and sensation, with interest, and apologised for his intrusion. He wanted to know whether a young man called Charles Martin had applied to him at any time within the last year or so for information about Arabia.

'Charles Martin? No. No, I don't think so. Many people do come, of course, to see me about one thing and another. And I cannot always remember their names afterwards. But I think I should remember anyone with that simple name. You like that tobacco? I know the very half-acre where it is grown. A beautiful place that has not changed since Alexander the Macedonian passed that way.' He smiled a little and added: 'Except, of course, that they have learned how to grow this weed. The weed, I understand, goes very well with a not too dry sherry. Another of the grosser indulgences that I avoid; but I shall have a fruit drink to keep you company.'

Grant thought that the desert tradition of hospitality to the stranger must come a little expensive in a London where you were a celebrity and all and sundry were free to drop in. He noticed that the label on the bottle that Lloyd had picked up was a guarantee as well as an announcement. It seemed that Lloyd was neither a pauper nor a piker.

'Charles Martin was also known as Bill Kenrick,' he said.

Lloyd lowered the glass which he was about to fill, and said:

'Kenrick! But he was here only the other day. Or rather, when I say only the other day, I mean a week or two ago. Quite lately, anyway. Why should he have an alias?'

'I don't know that myself. I am making inquiries about him on behalf of his friend. He was due to meet his friend in Paris at the beginning of March. On the 4th, to be exact. But he didn't turn up. We have discovered that he died as the result of an accident on the very day that he should have turned up in Paris.'

Lloyd put the glass slowly down on to the table.

'So that is why he did not come back,' he said in that querulous voice that did not mean to be querulous. 'Poor boy.'

'You had arranged to see him again?'

'Yes. I thought him charming and very intelligent. He was bitten with the desert—but perhaps you know that. He had ideas about exploring. A few young men still have. There are still the adventurers, even in this hedged and garnished world. Of which one must be glad. What happened to Kenrick? A car smash?'

'No. He had a fall on a train and fractured his skull.'

'Poor wretch. Poor wretch. A pity. I could have supplied the jealous gods with a dozen more expendable in his place. An atrocious word: expendable. The expression of an idea that would not even have been conceivable a few years ago. So far have we progressed towards our ultimate barbarism. Why did you want to know if the Kenrick boy had come to see me?'

'We wanted to pick up his trail. When he died he was masquerading as Charles Martin, with a complete set of Charles Martin's papers. We want to know at what stage he began to be Charles Martin. We were almost certain that, being bitten by the desert, he would come to see some authority on the subject in London, and since you, sir, are the ultimate authority we began with you.'

'I see. Well, it was most certainly as Kenrick, Bill Kenrick I think, that he came to see me. A dark young man, very attractive. Tough, too, in a nice way. I mean, good manners covering unknown possibilities. I found him delightful.'

'Had he come to you with any definite plans? I mean, with a specific proposition?'

Lloyd smiled a little. 'He came to me with one of the commonest of all the propositions that are habitually put to me. An expedition to the site of Wabar. Do you know about Wabar? It is the fabled city of Arabia. It is Arabia's "cities of the plain". How that pattern does repeat itself in legend. The human race feels eternally guilty when it is happy. We cannot even remark on our good health without touching wood or crossing our fingers or otherwise averting the gods' anger at mortal well-being. So Arabia has its Wabar: the city that was destroyed by fire because of its wealth and its sins.'

'And Kenrick thought that he had discovered the site.'

'He was sure of it. Poor boy, I hope that I was not short-tempered with him.'

'You think that he was wrong, then?'

'Mr Grant, the legend of Wabar exists from the Red Sea clear across Arabia to the Persian Gulf, and for almost every mile of that distance there is a different alleged site for the city.'

'And you don't believe that perhaps someone might stumble on it by accident?'

'By accident?'

'Kenrick was a flyer. It is possible that he saw the place when blown off his course, isn't it?'

'Had he talked to his friend about it then?'

'No. He had talked to no one that I know of. That was my own deduction. What is to hinder the discovery being made that way?'

'Nothing, of course, nothing; if the place exists at all. I have said: it is a legend almost universal throughout the world. But where stories of ruins have been tracked to their source the "ruins" have always proved to be something else. Natural rock formation, mirage, cloud-formation even. I think what poor Kenrick saw was the crater of a meteor. I have seen the place myself. A predecessor of mine discovered it when he was looking for Wabar. It is unbelievably like a place made with hands. The thrown-up earth makes pinnacles and jagged ruinous-looking heights. I think I have a photograph somewhere. You might like to see it: it is a unique affair.' He got up and slid back a panel in the bare painted-wood wall, disclosing shelves of books all the way from floor to ceiling. 'It is, perhaps mercifully, not every day a meteor of any size falls on the earth.'

He picked a photograph album from one of the lower shelves, and came back across the room looking for the place in the collection. And Grant was seized without warning by a strange sense of familiarity; a feeling of having met Lloyd somewhere before.

He looked at the photograph that Lloyd laid before him. It was certainly an uncanny thing. An almost mocking pastiche of human achievement. But his mind was busy with that odd moment of recognition.

Was it just that he had seen Heron Lloyd's photograph somewhere? But if it had been that, if he had merely seen Lloyd's face as adjunct to some description of his exploits, then the sense of recognition would have come when he had first walked into the room and seen him. It was not so much a recognition as a sense of having known Lloyd somewhere else. In some other surroundings.

'You see?' Lloyd was saying. 'Even on the ground, one has to go close up to it before one can be sure that the thing is not a collection of human dwellings. How much more misleading it must be from the air.'

'Yes,' agreed Grant, and did not believe it. For one very good reason. From the air the crater would have been plainly visible. From the air it would have looked exactly what it was: a circular hollow surrounded by the thrown-up earth. But he was not going to say that to Lloyd. Let Lloyd talk. He was growing very interested in Lloyd.

'That lies very close to the Kenrick boy's route across the desert, as described by himself, and I think that that is what he saw.'

'Did he pin-point the place, do you know?'

'I don't know. I didn't ask him. But I should think he would. He struck me as being a very efficient and intelligent young man.'

'You didn't ask him for details?'

'If someone told you, Mr Grant, that he had discovered a holly tree growing in the middle of Piccadilly immediately opposite the In and Out, would you be interested? Or would you just think that you must be patient with him? I know the Empty Quarter as well as you know Piccadilly.'

'Yes, of course. Then it was not you who saw him off at the station?'

'Mr Grant, I never see anyone off. A combination of masochism and sadism that I have always deplored. Off where, by the way?'

'To Scoone.'

'To the Highlands? I understood that he was longing for some gaiety. Why was he going to the Highlands?'

'We don't know. That is one of the things we are most anxious to find out. He said nothing to you that might provide a clue?'

'No. He did suggest finding other backing. I mean, when I had proved a broken reed. Perhaps he had found a backer, or hoped to find a backer, who lives up there. I can't think of any obvious one off-hand. There is Kinsey-Hewitt, of course. He has Scottish connections. But I think he is in Arabia at the moment.'

Well, at least Lloyd had provided the first reasonable explanation of the flying visit north with an overnight case. To talk to a possible backer. He had found a backer at the last moment, when he was almost due to meet Tad Cullen in Paris, and had dashed north to see him. That fitted beautifully. They were getting on. But why as Charles Martin?

As if the thought had been transferred, Lloyd said: 'By the way, if the Kenrick boy was travelling as Charles Martin, how has he been identified as Kenrick?'

'I travelled on that train to Scoone. I saw him when he was dead, and grew interested in some verse he had been scribbling.'

'Scribbling? On what?'

'On a blank bit of an evening paper,' Grant said, wondering why it should matter what Kenrick had been writing on.

'Oh '

'I was on holiday, with nothing else to do, so I amused myself with the clues provided.'

'You played detective.'

'Yes.'

'What is your profession, Mr Grant?'

'I'm a Civil Servant.'

'Ah. I was going to suggest the Army.' He smiled a little and picked up Grant's glass to refill it. 'The more rarefied ranks, of course.'

'G.S.O. 1?'

'No. An attaché, I think. Or Intelligence.'

'I have done a spot of Intelligence during my Army career.'

'So that is where you developed your taste for it. May I say, your flair.'

'Thank you.'

'It was no ordinary talent that identified Charles Martin as Bill Kenrick. Or had he Kenrick belongings that made the identification easy?'

'No. He was buried as Charles Martin.'

Lloyd paused as he was setting the filled glass down and said: 'That is so typical of that careless Scottish way of dealing with sudden death. They are always very smug about their lack of inquests. Myself, I think Scotland must be an ideal place in which to get away with murder. If ever I plan one, I shall lure my victim north of the Border.'

'There was an inquest, as it happens. The accident took place shortly after the train left Euston.'

'Oh.' Lloyd thought this over and then said: 'Don't you think that this should be reported to the police? I mean the fact that they have buried someone under a wrong name.'

Grant was about to say: 'The only proof we have that the dead Charles Martin was Kenrick is my identification of a not very good snapshot.' But something stopped him. Instead he said: 'We should like first to know why he had Charles Martin's papers.'

'Ah, yes. I see. That of course is a sufficiently questionable matter. One doesn't acquire a man's papers without some—preliminaries. Does anyone know who Charles Martin is—or was?'

'Yes. The police were satisfied on that score. There was no mystery.'

'The only mystery is how Kenrick came by his papers. I see why you are reluctant to go to official sources. What about this man who saw him off? At Euston. Could he have been Charles Martin?'

'He could, I suppose.'

'The papers may merely have been lent. Kenrick somehow did not strike me as a—shall we say, nefarious type.'

'No. On all the evidence, he wasn't.'

'It's a very curious business altogether. This accident that you say he had: I suppose there is no doubt that it was an accident? No suggestion of a quarrel?'

'No, it was just one of those things. A fall that might happen to anyone.'

'Distressing. As I say, there are too few young men nowadays who have the combination of courage and intelligence. A great many come to me, indeed they travel great distances to see me—'

He went on talking, and Grant sat watching and listening.

Were there, in fact, so many who came? Lloyd seemed very pleased to sit and talk to a stranger. There was no suggestion that he had an engagement for the evening or guests coming to dinner. None of the convenient pauses that a host leaves in the conversation so that a casual guest may take his leave. Lloyd sat talking in that thin, fanatic's voice and admiring the hands that lay in his lap. He continually changed the position of the hands, not as a gesture to emphasise a phrase, but as one making a new arrangement of some decoration. Grant found this Narcissus-like preoccupation fascinating. He listened to the silence of the little house, shut away from the town and its traffic. In that biography in *Who's Who* there had been no mention of wife or children; possessions that the owners of both are habitually proud to mention; so the household no doubt consisted of Lloyd and his servants. Had he sufficient interests to compensate for that lack of human companionship?

He, Alan Grant, had a household just as bare of human warmth; but his life was so full of people that to come back to his empty flat was a luxury, a spiritual delight. Was Heron Lloyd's life full and satisfying?

Or did your true Narcissus ever need any company other than his own image?

He wondered how old the man was. Older than he seemed, certainly; he was the doyen of Arabian exploration. Fifty-five or more. Probably nearer sixty. He had not given his date of birth in that biography, so the chances were that he was nearly sixty. There could not be many years of hard-living left to him, even given his good physique and condition. What would he do with the remaining years? Spend them admiring his hands?

'The only true democracy in the world today,' Lloyd was saying, 'and it is being destroyed by the thing that we call civilisation.' And again Grant had that sense of familiarity, of recognition. Was it that he had met Lloyd before? Or was it that Lloyd reminded

him of someone?

If so, of whom?

He must get away and think about this. It was time that he took his leave anyhow.

'Did Kenrick tell you where he was staying?' he asked as he began to take his leave.

'No. We made no definite appointment to meet again, you understand. I asked him to come to see me again before he left London. When he did not come I believed that he was resentful, perhaps angry, at my lack of—sympathy, shall we say?'

'Yes, it must have been a blow to him. Well, I have taken up a great deal of your time, and you have been very forbearing. I am most grateful.'

'I am very glad to have been of help. I am afraid it has not been very valuable help. If there is anything else that I can do in the matter I hope very much that you will not hesitate to call on me.'

"Well—there is one thing, but you have already been so kind that I hate to ask you. Especially since it is a little irrelevant."

'What is it?'

'May I perhaps borrow the photograph?'

'The photograph?'

'The photograph of the meteor crater. I notice that the print is slotted into your album, not pasted. I should like very much to show it to Kenrick's friend. I promise faithfully to return it. And in perfect—'

'But of course you may have the photograph. And don't bother to return it. I took the picture myself, and the negative is filed in the proper place. I can replace the print at any time with ease.'

He manœuvred the print from its anchorage in the album, and handed it to Grant. He came downstairs with Grant and saw him to the door, talked a little about the little courtyard when Grant admired it, and waited courteously until Grant had reached the gate before closing the door on him.

Grant opened the evening paper that was lying on the car cushions and laid the photograph carefully between its folds. Then he drove down to the river and along the Embankment.

The old place looked very much as usual, he thought, as the hideous pile loomed up in the dusk. And so, too, did the finger-print department once he got there. Cartwright was stubbing out a cigarette in the saucer of a half-drunk cup of cold tea and admiring his latest handiwork: a complete set of left-hand prints.

'Lovely, 'm?' he said, looking up as Grant's shadow fell across him. 'These are going to hang Pinky Mason.'

'Hadn't Pinky the price of a pair of gloves?'

'Huh! Pinky could have bought up Dents. He just couldn't believe, clever little man Pinky, that the police would ever get round to thinking it anything but a suicide. Gloves are for small-time trash: burglars and such; not for master-minds like Pinky. You been away?'

Yes. I've been fishing in the Highlands. If you're not too busy could you do something off the cuff for me?'

'Now?'

'Oh, no. Tomorrow would do.'

Cartwright looked at the clock. 'I've nothing to do till I meet my wife at the theatre. We're going to Marta Hallard's new play. So I can do it now, if you like. Is it a difficult job?'

'No. Dead easy. Just here, in the lower right-hand corner of this photograph, there is a beautiful thumb-print. And at the back I think you'll find a nice set of finger-tips. I want to check them with the files.'

'All right. Will you wait?'

'I'm going to the library. I'll come back.'

In the library he took down *Who*'s *Who*, and looked up Kinsey-Hewitt. The paragraph on Kinsey-Hewitt was a very modest little affair compared with the half-column on Heron Lloyd. He was a much younger man, it seemed; married, with two children; and his address was a London one. The 'Scottish connection' that Lloyd had mentioned seemed to consist in the fact that he was the younger son of some Kinsey-Hewitt who had a place in Fife.

Well, there was always the chance that he was now, or had been lately, in Scotland. Grant went to a telephone and called the London address. A woman with a pleasant voice answered, and said that her husband was not at home. No, he would not be at home for some time; he was in Arabia. He had been in Arabia since November and was not expected back until May at the earliest. Grant thanked her and hung up. It had not been to Kinsey-Hewitt that Bill Kenrick had gone. Tomorrow, he would have to go through the various authorities on Arabia, one by one, and ask them the question.

He went back, after some coffee-housing with such friends as he happened to run into at that hour, to Cartwright.

'Got the photograph or am I too early?'

'I've not only got it but looked it up for you. The answer is no.'

'No, I didn't really think there would be anything. I was just clearing decks. But thank you, all the same. I'll take the print with me. I thought the new Hallard show got awful notices.'

'Did it? I never read 'em. Neither does Beryl. She just likes Marta Hallard. So do I, if it comes to that. Nice long legs. Good night.' 'Good night, and thanks again.'

'You don't seem awfully sweet on this guy,' Tad Cullen said, when Grant had finished this story over the telephone.

'Don't I? Oh, well, perhaps it's just that he doesn't happen to be what we call my cup of tea. Look, Tad, you're quite sure that you have no idea, even in the back of your mind, where Bill could have been staying?'

'I haven't got a back to my mind. I have just a small, narrow space in front where I keep all that's useful to me. A few telephone numbers, and a prayer or two.'

'Well, tomorrow I'd like you to do the round of the more obvious places, if you would.'

'Yes, sure. I'll do anything. Anything you say.'

'All right. Have you got a pen? Here's the list.'

Grant gave him the names of twenty of the more likely places, going on the assumption that a young man from the wide open spaces and the small towns would look for a caravanseral that was both large and gay and not too expensive. And just for good measure he added a couple of the best-known expensive ones; young men with several months' back-pay were liable to be extravagant.

'I don't think I'd bother with any more than that,' he said.

'Are there any more?'

'If he didn't stay in one of these, then we're sunk, because if he didn't stay in any of them we'd have to hunt every hotel in London to find him, to say nothing of the boarding-houses.'

'Okay. I'll start first thing in the morning. Mr Grant, I'd like to tell you how much I appreciate what you're doing for me. Giving up your time to something that no one else could do; I mean, something the police wouldn't touch. If it wasn't for you—'

'Listen, Tad. I'm not being benevolent. I'm being self-indulgent and typically nosey and I'm enjoying myself to the top of my bent. If I wasn't, believe me I wouldn't be in London. I'd be going to sleep tonight in Clune. So good night and sleep well. We'll crack this thing between us.'

He hung up and went to see what Mrs Tinker had left on the stove. It seemed to be a sort of shepherd's pie. He carried it into the living-room and ate it absent-mindedly, his thoughts still on Lloyd.

What was familiar about Lloyd?

He went back in his mind over the few moments before his first feeling of recognition. What had Lloyd been doing? Pulling open the panel of the book cupboard. Pulling it open with a gesture self-consciously graceful; faintly exhibitionist. What was there in that to provoke a sense of familiarity?

And there was something even more curious.

Why had Lloyd said 'On what?' when he had mentioned Kenrick's scribbling?

That, surely, was a most unnatural reaction.

What exactly had he said to Lloyd? He had said that he became interested in Kenrick because of some verses he had been scribbling. The normal come-back to that was surely: 'Verses?' The operative word in the sentence was verses. That he was scribbling was entirely by the way.

And that anyone's reaction to the information should be to say 'On what?' was inexplicable.

Except that no human reaction was inexplicable.

It was Grant's experience that it was the irrelevant, the unconsidered words in a statement that were important. Quite surprising and gratifying revelations lay in the gap between an assertion and a non-sequitur.

Why had Lloyd said 'On what?'

He took the problem to bed with him, and fell asleep with it.

In the morning he began his hunt through the authorities on Arabia, and finished it not at all astonished that it had produced no result. People who explored Arabia as a hobby very seldom had money to back anything. They were, on the contrary, usually prospecting for backing themselves. The only chance had been that some one of them had proved interested to the point of being willing to share his backing. But none of them had ever heard of either Charles Martin or Bill Kenrick.

It was lunch-time before he finished, and he stood by the window waiting for Tad's call and wondering whether to go out to luncheon or to let Mrs Tinker make him an omelette. It was another grey day but there was a slight breeze and a smell of damp earth that was queerly countrified. A fine fishing day, he noted. He wished for a moment that he was walking down over the moor to the river instead of wrestling with the London telephone system. It wouldn't even have to be the river. He would settle for an afternoon on Lochan Dhu in a leaky boat with Pat for company.

He turned to his desk and began to clear up the mess of this morning's opened mail. He had stooped to throw the torn pages and the empty envelopes into the waste-paper basket, but he stopped with the action half spent.

It had come to him.

He knew now who it was that Heron Lloyd reminded him of.

It was Wee Archie.

This was so unexpected and so ridiculous that he sat down on the chair by his desk and began to laugh.

What had Wee Archie in common with that elegant and sophisticated creature who was Heron Lloyd?

Frustration? Of a surety not. The fact that he was an Auslander in the country of his devotion? No; too far-fetched. It was something nearer home than that.

For it was of Wee Archie that Lloyd had reminded him. He had no doubt of that now. He was experiencing that inimitable relief

that comes when one has remembered a name that has eluded one.

Yes, it was Wee Archie.

But why?

What had that incongruous pair in common?

Their gestures? No. Their physique? No. Their voices? Was that it?

'Their vanity, you fool!' said that inner voice in him.

Yes; that was it. Their vanity. Their pathological vanity.

He sat very still, considering this; not amused any longer.

Vanity. The first requisite in wrong-doing. The constant factor in the criminal mind.

Just supposing that—

The telephone at his elbow gave its sudden purr.

It was Tad. He had reached number eighteen, he said, and was now an old old man but the blood of pioneers was in his veins and he was pursuing the search.

'Drop it for a little and come and eat with me somewhere.'

'Oh, I've had my lunch. I had a coupla bananas and a milk shake in Leicester Square.'

'Merciful Heaven!' said Grant.

'What's the matter with that?

'Starch; that's what's the matter with it.'

'A little starch is fine when you're ironed out. No luck your end?'

'No. If it was a backer he was going North to see, then the backer was merely some amateur who had money; not anyone actively engaged in Arabian exploration.'

'Oh. Well. I'll be on my way. When shall I ring you next?'

'As soon as you come to the end of the list. I'll wait here for your call.'

Grant decided to have the omelette, and while Mrs Tinker prepared it he walked about his living-room letting his mind soar into speculation and pulling it down instantly to a common-sense level, so that it behaved like telegraph lines outside a railway compartment; continually soaring and continually caught back.

If only they had a starting-point. What if Tad came to the end of the likely hotels and still drew a blank? It was only a matter of days before he would have to go back to work. He stopped speculating on vanity and its possibilities and began to reckon how long it would take Tad to cover the remaining four hotels.

But before his omelette was half finished Tad arrived in person. He was flushed and triumphant.

'I don't know how you ever thought of that dull little dump in connection with Bill,' he said, 'but you were right. That's where he stayed all right.'

'And which is the dull little dump?'

'The Pentland. How did you think of that one?'

'It has an international reputation.'

'That one has?'

'And English people go on going to it generation after generation.'

'That's what it looks like!'

'So that is where Bill Kenrick stayed. I like him more than ever.'

'Yeah,' Tad said more quietly. And the flush of triumph died away. 'I wish you'd known Bill. I sure wish you'd known him. They don't come any better than Bill.'

'Sit down and have some coffee to settle your milk shake. Or would you like a drink?'

'No, thanks, I'll have coffee. It actually smells like coffee,' he added in a surprised way. 'Bill checked out on the 3rd. The 3rd of March.'

'Did you ask about his luggage?'

'Sure. They weren't all that interested at first. But eventually they got out a ledger the size of the Judgement Book and said that Mr Kenrick had left nothing either in the box-room or the safe.'

'That means that he took them to a cloak-room—to a left-luggage office, that is—to be ready to his hand when he came back from Scotland. If he meant to fly when he came back, then I suppose he would leave them at Euston to be picked up on his way to the airport. If he meant to go by sea, then he may have taken them to Victoria before going to Euston. Did he like the sea?'

'So-so. He wasn't daffy about it. But he had a mania for ferries.'

'Ferries?'

'Yes. Seems it began when he was a kid at a place called Pompey—know where that is?' Grant nodded. 'And he spent all his time on a penny ferry.'

'A ha'penny one, it used to be.'

'Well, anyway.'

'So the train-ferry might have had an interest for him, you think. Well, we can but try. But if he was going to be late in meeting you, I should think he would fly over. Would you know the cases if you saw them?'

'Oh, yes. Bill and I shared a Company bungalow. I helped pack them. In fact one of them's mine, if it comes to that. He just took the two of them. He said if we bought many things we could buy a suitcase to—' Tad's voice died away suddenly and he buried his face in his coffee cup. It was a great flat bowl of a cup, willow-patterned in pink, which Marta Hallard had brought back from Sweden for Grant because he liked his coffee out of large cups; and it made a very good screen for emotion.

'We have no ticket to recover them with, you see. And I can't use any official means. But I know most of the men on duty at the big terminuses, and can probably wangle our way behind the scenes. It will be up to you to spot the cases. Was Bill a labeller by

nature, would you say?'

'I expect he'd label things he was going to leave behind like that. Why, do you think, did he not have the left-luggage ticket in his pocket-book?'

'I did think that someone else may have deposited those cases for him. The person who saw him off at Euston, for instance.'

'The Martin guy?'

'It might be. If he had borrowed papers for this odd masquerade, he would have to return them. Perhaps Martin was going to meet him at the airport, or at Victoria, or wherever it was that he had planned to leave England from, with the cases and collect his own papers.'

'Yeah. That makes sense. I suppose we couldn't Agony-advertise for this Martin?'

'I don't think that this Martin would be very willing to answer, having lent his papers for a piece of sharp practice and being now without identity.'

'No. Perhaps you're right. He wasn't anyone who was staying at that hotel, anyway.'

'How do you know that?' asked Grant, surprised.

'I looked through the book: the register. When I was identifying Bill's signature.'

'You're wasted in OCAL, Tad. You should come to us.'

But Tad was not listening. 'You've no idea what a queer feeling it was to see Bill's writing suddenly like that, among all those strange names. It sort of stopped my breath.'

Grant took Lloyd's picture of the crater 'ruins' from his desk and brought it over to the table. 'That is what Heron Lloyd thinks that Bill saw.'

Tad looked at it with interest. 'It sure is queer, isn't it? Just like ruined sky-scrapers. You know, until I saw Arabia I thought the United States invented sky-scrapers. But some of those old Arab towns are just the Empire State on a smaller scale. But you say it couldn't have been this that Bill saw.'

'No. From the air it must be quite obvious what it is.'

'Did you tell Lloyd that?'

'No. I just let him talk.'

'Why do you dislike the guy so much?'

'I didn't say that I disliked him.'

'You don't have to.'

Grant hesitated; analysing, as always, just exactly what he did feel.

'I find vanity repellent. As a person I loathe it, and as a policeman I distrust it.'

'It's a harmless sort of weakness,' Tad said, with a tolerant lift of a shoulder.

'That is just where you are wrong. It is *the* utterly destructive quality. When you say vanity, you are thinking of the kind that admires itself in mirrors and buys things to deck itself out in. But that is merely personal conceit. Real vanity is something quite different. A matter not of person but of personality. Vanity says "I must have this because I am me". It is a frightening thing because it is incurable. You can never convince Vanity that anyone else is of the slightest importance; he just doesn't understand what you are talking about. He will kill a person rather than be put to the inconvenience of doing a six months' stretch.'

'But that's being insane.'

'Not according to Vanity's reckoning. And certainly not in the medical sense. It is merely Vanity being logical. It is, as I said, a frightening trait; and the basis of all criminal personality. Criminals—true criminals, as opposed to the little man who cooks the accounts in an emergency or the man who kills his wife when he finds her in bed with a stranger—true criminals vary in looks and tastes and intelligence and method as widely as the rest of the world does, but they have one invariable characteristic: their pathological varity.'

Tad looked as though he were only half-listening because he was using this information on some private reference of his own. 'Listen, Mr Grant,' he said, 'are you saying that this guy Lloyd isn't to be trusted?'

Grant thought that over.

'I wish I knew,' he said at last. 'I wish I knew.'

'We-e-ll!' said Tad. 'That sure puts a different look on things, don't it!'

'I've spent quite a long time this morning wondering whether I have seen so much of the vanity in criminals that I have begun to have a "thing" about it; to distrust it unduly. On the face of it Heron Lloyd is irreproachable. He is more: he is admirable. He has a fine record behind him; he lives simply; he has excellent taste, which means a natural sense of proportion; and he has achieved enough surely to satisfy the most egotistical soul.'

'But you think—there's something wrong somewhere.'

'Do you remember a little man in the hotel at Moymore who did missionary work on you?'

'Persecuted Scotland! The little man in kilts.'

'A kilt,' said Grant automatically. 'Well, for some reason Lloyd gives me the same feeling as Archie Brown. It's absurd, but it is very strong. They have the same—' He looked for a word.

'Smell,' said Tad.

'Yes. That's about it. They have the same smell.'

After a long silence Tad said: 'Mr Grant, are you still of the opinion that what happened to Bill was an accident?'

'Yes, because there is no evidence to the contrary. But I'm quite prepared to believe that it wasn't, if I can see any reason for it. Can you clean windows?'

'Can I what?'

'Clean windows.'

'I could make a shot at it if really pushed, I suppose,' Tad said, staring. 'Why?'

'You may have to before this is over. Let us go and collect those suitcases. I'm hoping that all the information we want will be in those cases. I've just remembered that Bill booked that berth to Scoone a week in advance.'

'Perhaps his backer in Scotland couldn't see him until the 4th.'

'Perhaps. Anyhow, all his papers and personal things will be in one of the cases, and I'm hoping that it will include a diary.'

'Bill wouldn't keep a diary!'

'Not that kind. The Meet-Jack-1.15-Call-For-Toots-7.30 kind.'

'Oh, yes, that. Yes, I expect he'd have one of those if he was going touting round London for backing. Brother, that may be all we need!'

'That will be all we need. If it is there.'

But nothing was there.

Nothing at all.

They began light-heartedly with the obvious places: Euston, the airport, Victoria; pleased with the formula that worked so well.

'Hullo, Inspector. What can I do for you today?'

'Well, you might be able to help my young friend from America.'

'Yes? One for the three-thirty?'

'We've got one for the three-thirty. He wants to know whether his buddy left a couple of suitcases here. Do you mind if he has a look round? We don't want to move anything. Just to look.'

'Well, that's something that's still free in this country, Inspector, believe it or not. Come behind, will you?'

So they came behind. Each time they came behind. And each time the tiered luggage looked back at them, contemptuous and withdrawn. As detached as only other people's belongings can look.

From the likely places they moved on to the mere possibles, sobered and apprehensive. They had hoped for a diary, for personal papers. Now they would settle for even a sight of those suitcases.

But there were no familiar cases on any of the shelves.

This so staggered Tad that Grant had difficulty in dragging him away from the later ports-of-call. He went round and round the filled racks in an unbelieving daze.

'They must be here,' he kept saying. 'They must be here.'

But they were not there.

As they came out on to the street, baffled, after their last bet had gone down the drain, he said: 'Inspector, I mean Mr Grant, where else is there that you would leave luggage after checking out of a hotel? Have you those personal lock-up places?'

'Only limited-period ones. For people who want to park a case for an hour or two while they do something.'

'Well, where *are* Bill's things, why aren't they in any of the obvious places?'

'I don't know. They may be with his girl.'

'What girl?'

'I don't know. He was young, and handsome, and celibate; he would have a fairly wide choice.'

'Yes, of course. That's maybe what he did with them. Which reminds me.' His face lost its discontented, purposeless look. He glanced at his watch. It was nearly dinner-time. 'I've got a date with that girl in the milk-bar.' He caught Grant's eye and looked faintly abashed. 'But I'll stand her up if you think I can be any good to you.'

Grant sent him away to meet his milk-bar sweetie with a slight sense of relief. It was rather like having a mournful puppy around. He himself decided to postpone dinner for a little and go and see some of his Metropolitan friends.

He dropped into the Astwick Street Police Station and was greeted with the identical phrase that he had been listening to all the afternoon and evening: 'Hullo, Inspector, what can we do for you?'

Grant said that they might tell him who was on the Britt Lane beat just now.

The man on the beat was P.C. Bithel, it seemed; and if the Inspector wanted to see him he was at this moment in the canteen having sausage-and-mash. His number was 30.

Grant found Number Thirty at a table by himself at the far end of the room. A French grammar was propped up in front of him. Looking at him, sitting there unaware, Grant thought how London policemen had changed in type in the short space of a quarter-century. He himself, he knew, was a departure from type; a fact that had been of great use to him on various occasions. P.C. Bithel was a dark, slight boy from County Down with a matt sallow skin and a kind reassuring drawl. Between the French grammar and the drawl, Grant felt that P.C. Bithel was headed for great things.

The boy began to get up when Grant had introduced himself, but Grant sat down and said: 'There's one small thing you might do for me. I'd like to know who cleans the windows of 5 Britt Lane. You might make a few inquiries when—'

'Mr Lloyd's place?' the boy said. 'Richards does them.'

Yes, indeed, and indeed P.C. Bithel had a future; he must keep his eye on P.C. Bithel.

'How do you know that?'

'I pass the time of day with him here and there on my beat. He stables his barrow and things in that mews further along Britt Lane.'

He thanked the budding Superintendent and went away to find Richards. Richards, it seemed, lived above his barrow. He was a bachelor ex-serviceman with a short leg, a cat, a collection of china mugs, and a passion for darts. There was nothing that P.C. Bithel, not long from County Down, did not know about his London beat.

At the corner of Britt Lane was the Sun, where Richards played darts, and it was to the Sun that Grant went. This was to be an altogether informal arrangement and it demanded an informal launching. He did not know the Sun or its proprietor, but he had only to sit still and behave himself and presently he would be invited to play darts, and from that to having a quiet one with Richards was only a step.

It was a step that took a couple of hours, as it turned out; but eventually he had Richards to himself in a corner with a pint. He was debating with himself whether to produce his card and use his official credentials for unofficial business, or to make it an affair of one ex-serviceman obliging another for a small consideration, when Richards said:

'You don't seem to have put on any weight with the years, sir.'

'Have I met you somewhere?' Grant asked, a little annoyed that he should have forgotten a face.

'Camberley. More years ago than I like to think about. And you needn't worry about forgetting me,' he added, 'because I doubt if you ever saw me. I was a cook. You still in the Army?'

'No, I'm a policeman.'

'No kidding! Well, well. I'd have said you were a dead cert for C.I.G.S. I see now why you were so anxious to get me into a corner. And me thinking it was my way with a dart that won you!'

Grant laughed. 'Yes, you can do something for me, but it isn't official business. Would you take a pupil tomorrow for a small consideration?'

'To do any special windows?' Richards asked, after a moment's thought.

'Number 5 Britt Lane.'

'Ho!' said Richards, amused. 'I'd pay him to do them?'

'Why?'

'That bastard is never pleased. There's no hanky-panky about this, is there?'

'Neither hanky, nor panky. Nothing is going to be abstracted from the house, and nothing upset. I'll go bail for that. Indeed, if it will make you any happier, I'll put the contract in writing.'

'I'll take your word for it, sir. And your man can have the privilege of doing Mr Flipping Lloyd's windows for nothing.' He lifted his mug. 'Here's to the old eyes-right. What time will your pupil be coming along tomorrow?'

'Ten o'clock do?'

'Make it half-past. Your valentine goes out most mornings about eleven.'

'That's very thoughtful of you.'

'I'll get my early windows done and meet him at my place—3 Britt Mews—at half-past ten.'

It was no use trying to telephone Tad Cullen again tonight, so Grant left a message at the Westmorland asking him to come to the flat as soon as he had had breakfast in the morning.

Then he at last had dinner, and went thankfully to bed.

As he was falling asleep a voice in his head said: 'Because he knew that there was nothing to write on.'

'What?' he said, coming awake. 'Who knew?'

'Lloyd. He said: "On what?"'

'Yes. Well?'

'He said it because he was startled.'

'He certainly sounded surprised.'

'He was surprised because he knew that there was nothing to write on.'

He lay thinking about this until he fell asleep.

Tad arrived, very washed and shining, before Grant had finished breakfast. His soul was troubled, however, and he had to be coaxed out of a contrite mood ('Can't help feeling that I walked out on you, Mr Grant') before he was any good to anyone. He cheered up at last when he found that there were definite plans for the day.

'You mean you were serious about window cleaning? I thought it was only a—a sort of figure of speech, maybe. You know: like "I'll be selling matches for a living if this goes on." Why am I going to clean Lloyd's windows?'

'Because it is the only honest way of getting a foot inside the house. My colleagues can prove that you have no right to read a gasmeter, or test the electricity, or the telephone. But they cannot deny that you are a window-cleaner and are legally and professionally getting on with your job. Richards—your boss for today—says that Lloyd goes out nearly every day about eleven, and he is going to take you there when Lloyd has gone. He'll stay with you and work with you, of course, so that he can introduce you as his assistant who is learning the trade. That way you will be accepted without suspicion and left alone.'

'So I'm left alone.'

'On the desk in the big room that occupies most of the first floor there is an engagement book. A large, very expensive, red-leather affair. The desk is a table one—I mean that it doesn't shut—and it stands just inside the middle window.'

'So?'

'I want to know Lloyd's engagements for the 3rd and 4th of March.'

'You think maybe he travelled on that train, 'm?'

'I should like to be sure that he didn't, anyhow. If I know what his engagements were I can find out quite easily whether he kept them or not.'

'Okay. That's quite easy. I'm looking forward to that window cleaning. I've always wondered what I could do when I get too old for flying. I might as well look into the window trade. To say nothing of looking into a few windows.'

He went away, blithe and apparently forgetful that half an hour ago he was 'lower than a worm's belly', and Grant looked round in his mind for any acquaintances that he and Heron Lloyd might have in common. He remembered that he had not yet rung up Marta Hallard to announce his return to town. It might be a little early in the day to break in on Marta's slumbers, but he would risk it.

'Oh, no,' Marta said, 'you didn't wake me. I'm half-way through my breakfast and having my daily dose of news. Every day I swear that never again will I read a daily paper, and every morning there is the blasted thing lying waiting for me to open it and every morning I open it. It upsets my digestive juices, and hardens my arteries, and my face falls with a thud and undoes five guineas' worth of Ayesha's ministrations in five minutes, but I have to have my daily dose of poison. How are you, my dear? Are you better?'

She listened to his answer without interrupting. One of Marta's more charming characteristics was her capacity for listening. With most of his other women friends silence meant that they were preparing their next speech and were merely waiting for the next appropriate moment to give utterance to it.

'Have supper with me tonight. I'll be alone,' she said when she had heard about Clune and his recovered health.

'Make it early next week, can you? How is the play going?'

'Well, darling, it would be going a lot better if Ronnie would come up-stage now and then and talk to me instead of to the audience. He says it emphasises the detachment of the character to practically stamp on the floats and let the front stalls count his eyelashes, but I think myself it's just a hangover from his music-hall days.'

They discussed both Ronnie and the play for a little, and then Grant said: 'Do you know Heron Lloyd, by the way?'

'The Arabia man? Not to say know; no. But I understand he's almost as much of a hogger as Ronnie.'

'How?'

'Rory—my brother's boy—was mad to go exploring in Arabia—though why anyone should want to go exploring in Arabia I can't imagine—all dust and dates—anyway, Rory wanted to go with Heron Lloyd, but it seems that Lloyd travels only with Arabs. Rory, who is a nice child, says that that is because Lloyd is so Arabian that he is *plus royaliste que le roi*, but I think myself—being a low-minded creature and a rogue and vagabond—that he is just suffering from Ronnie's trouble and wants the whole stage.'

'What is Rory doing now?' Grant asked, skating away from Heron Lloyd.

'Oh, he's in Arabia. The other man took him. Kinsey-Hewitt. Oh, yes, Rory wouldn't be put off by a little thing like a snub. Can you make it Tuesday: the supper?'

Yes, he would make it Tuesday. Before Tuesday he would be back at work, and the matter of Bill Kenrick, who had come to England full of excitement about Arabia and had died as Charles Martin in a train going to the Highlands, would have to be put behind him. He had only a day or two more.

He went out to have a hair-cut, and to think in that relaxed hypnotic atmosphere of anything that they had left undone. Tad Cullen was lunching with his boss. 'Richards won't accept anything for this,' he had said to Tad, 'so take him out to lunch and give him a thundering good one and I'll pay for it.'

'I'll take him out all right and be glad to,' Tad said, 'but I'm damned if I'll let you pay for it. Bill Kenrick was my buddy, not yours.'

So he sat in the warm, aromatic air of the barber's shop, half dive half clinic, and tried to think of something that they could still do to find Bill Kenrick's suitcases. But it was the returning Tad who provided the suggestion.

Why, said Tad, not Agony-advertise for this girl.

'What girl?'

'The girl who has his luggage. She has no reason to be shy—unless she's been helping herself to the contents, which wouldn't be

unknown. But Bill is a—was a better picker than that. Why don't we say in capital letters: "BILL KENRICK"—to catch the eye, get it? — and then just: "Any friend get in touch with Number what's-it." Is there anything against that?'

No, Grant could think of nothing against that, but his eye was on the piece of paper that Tad was fishing from his pocket.

'Did you find the book?'

'Oh, yes. I had only to lean in and pick it up. That guy doesn't do any homework, it seems. It's the dullest list of engagements outside a prison. Not a gardenia from start to finish. And no good to us anyway.'

'No good?'

'He was busy, it seems. Will I write out that advertisement for the papers?'

'Yes, do. There's paper in my desk.'

'Which papers shall we send it to?'

'Write six, and we can address them later.'

He looked down at Tad's child-like copy of the entries in Lloyd's engagement book. The entries for the 3rd and 4th of March. And as he read them the full absurdity of his suspicions came home to him. What was he thinking of? Was his mind still the too-impressionable mind of a sick man? How could he ever have dreamed that Heron Lloyd could possibly have been moved to murder? Because that was what he had been thinking, wasn't it? That somehow, in some way that they could not guess, Lloyd had been responsible for Bill Kenrick's death.

He looked at the crucial entries, and thought that even if it were proved that Lloyd had not kept these particular engagements it would be fantastic to read into that absence any more than the normal explanation: that Lloyd had been indisposed or had changed his mind. On the night of the 3rd he had apparently attended a dinner. 'Pioneer Society, Normandie, 7.15' the entry read. At 9.30 the following morning a Pathé Magazine film unit were due to arrive at 5 Britt Lane and make him into number something-or-other of their Celebrities At Home series. It would seem that Heron Lloyd had more important things to think of than an unknown flyer who claimed to have seen ruins in the sands of Arabia.

'But he said: "On what?"' said that voice in him.

'All *right*, he said: "On what?"! A fine world it would be if one was going to be suspected, if one was going to be judged, by every unconsidered remark.'

The Commissioner had once said to him: 'You have the most priceless of all attributes for your job, and that is flair. But don't let it ride you, Grant. Don't let your imagination take hold. Keep it your servant.'

He had been in danger of letting his flair bolt with him. He must take a pull on himself.

He would go back to where he was before he saw Lloyd. Back to the company of Bill Kenrick. Back from wild imaginings to fact. Hard, bare, uncompromising fact.

He looked across at Tad, nose to paper and pursuing his pen across the page with it as a terrier noses a spider across a floor.

'How was your milk-bar lady?'

'Oh, fine, fine,' said Tad, absent-minded and not lifting his glance from his handiwork.

'Taking her out again?'

'Uh-huh. Meeting her tonight.'

'Think she will do as a steady?'

'She might,' Tad said, and then as he became aware of this unusual interest he looked up and said: 'What's this in aid of?'

'I'm thinking of deserting you for a day or two, and I'd like to know that you won't be bored if left to your own devices.'

'Oh. Oh, no; I'll be all right. It's time you took some time off to attend to your own affairs, I guess. After all, this is no trouble of yours. You've done far too much as it is.'

'I'm not taking time off. I'm planning to fly over and see Charles Martin's people.'

'People?'

'His family. They live just outside Marseilles.'

Tad's face, which had looked for a moment like a lost child's, grew animated again.

'What do you reckon to get from them?'

'I'm not doing any reckoning. I'm just beginning from the other end. We've come to a blank wall where Bill Kenrick is concerned —unless his hypothetical girl-friend answers that advertisement and that won't be for two days at the very least—so we'll try the Charles Martin end and where we get from there.'

'Fine. What about me coming with you?'

'I think not, Tad. I think you had better stay here and be O.C. the Press. See that all these are inserted and pick up any answers.'

'You're the boss,' Tad said in a resigned way. 'But I sure would like to see Marseilles.'

'It's not a bit the way you picture it,' Grant said, amused.

'How do you know how I picture it?'

'I can imagine.'

'Oh, well, I suppose I can sit on a stool and look at Daphne. What funny names girls have in this neck of the woods. It's a bit draughty, but I can count up the number of times people say thank-you for doing other people service.'

'if it's iniquity you're looking for you'll find as much on a Leicester Square pavement as you will on the Cannebière.'

'Maybe, but I like my iniquity with some ooh-la-la in it.'

'Hasn't Daphne got any ooh-la-la?'

'No. Daphne's very la-di-da. I have an awful suspicion that she wears woollen underwear.'

'She would need it in a milk-bar in Leicester Square in April. She sounds a nice girl.'

'Oh, she's fine, fine. But don't you stay too long away, or the wolf in me will prove too strong and I'll take the first plane out to Marseilles to join you. When do you plan to go?'

'Tomorrow morning, if I can get a seat. Move over and let me reach the telephone. If I get an early-morning service I can, with a

piece of luck, get back the following day. If not, then Friday at the latest. How did you get on with Richards?'

'Oh, we're great buddies. But I'm a bit disillusioned.'

- 'About what?'
- 'About the possibilities of the trade.'
- 'Doesn't it pay?'

'I expect it pays off in coin but not any other way, take it from me. All you can see from outside a window, believe it or not, is your own reflection in the glass. What are the names of those papers you want me to address these things to?'

Grant gave him the names of the six newspapers with the largest circulations, and sent him away with his blessing to employ his time as he saw fit until they met again.

'I certainly wish I was going with you,' Tad said once more as he was leaving, and Grant wondered if seeing the South of France as one big honky-tonk was any more absurd than seeing it as mimosa. Which was what it was to him.

'France!' said Mrs Tinker. 'When you've only just come back from foreign parts!'

'The Highlands may be foreign parts, but the South of France is merely an extension of England.'

'It's a very expensive extension, I've 'eard. Roonous. When was you expectin' to be back? I got a loverly chicken from Carr's for you.'

'The day after tomorrow, I hope. Friday at the latest.'

'Oh, then it'll keep. Was you wantin' to be called earlier tomorrow mornin', then?'

'I'll be away before you come in, I think. So you can have a late morning tomorrow.'

'A late mornin' wouldn't suit Tinker, it wouldn't. But I'll get me shoppin' done before I come in. Now you see and take care of yerself. No burning the candle at both ends and comin' back lookin' no better than when you went away to Scotland in the beginnin'. I 'ope it keeps fine for you!'

Fine indeed, Grant thought, looking down at the map of France next morning. From that height on this crystal morning it was not a thing of earth and water and crops. It was a small jewelled pattern set in a lapis-lazuli sea; a Fabergé creation. Not much wonder that flyers as a species had a detached attitude to the world. What had the world—its literature, its music, its philosophies, or its history—to do with a man who saw it habitually for the thing it was: a bit of Fabergé nonsense?

Marseilles, at close quarters, was no jeweller's creation. It was the usual noisy crowded place filled with impatient taxi-horns and the smell of stale coffee; that very French smell that haunts its houses with the ghosts of ten million coffee-brewings. But the sun shone, and the striped awnings flapped a little in the breeze from the Mediterranean, and the mimosa displayed its pale expensive yellow in prodigal masses. As a companion picture to the grey and scarlet of London it was, he thought, perfect. If he ever was rich he would commission one of the best artists in the world to put the two pictures on canvas for him; the chiaroscuro of London and bright positive blaze of Marseilles. Or perhaps two different artists. It was unlikely that the man who could convey the London of a grey day in April would also be able to paint the essence of Marseilles on a spring noon.

He stopped thinking about artists and ceased to find Marseilles either bright or positive when he found that the Martin family had left their suburb only the week before for parts unknown. Unknown, that was, to the neighbours. By the time that he had with the help of the local authorities discovered that 'part unknown' merely meant Toulon, a great deal of precious time had been wasted, and still more was wasted in journeying to Toulon and finding the Martins among its teeming inhabitants.

But in the end he found them and listened to the little they had to tell. Charles was a 'bad boy', they said, with all the antagonism of the French for someone who has apostatised from that supreme god of the French idolatry, the Family. He had always been a wilful, headstrong creature and (crime of crimes in the French calendar) lazy. Bone lazy. He had gone away five years ago after a small trouble over a girl—no, no, he had merely stabbed her—and had not bothered to write to them. They had had no news of him in all those years except that a friend had run into him in Port Said about three years ago. He was doing pavement deals in second-hand cars, the friend said. Buying up crocks and selling them after he had tinkered with them a little. He was a very good mechanic; he could have been a very successful man, with a garage of his own and people working for him, if he had not been so lazy. Bone lazy. A laziness that was formidable. A laziness that was a disease. They had heard nothing more of him until they had been asked to identify his body.

Grant asked if they had a photograph of Charles.

Yes, they had several, but of course they were of Charles when he was much younger.

They showed him the photographs, and Grant saw why Bill Kenrick, dead, looked not too unlike the Charles Martin that his family had remembered. One thin dark man with marked eyebrows, hollowed cheeks, and straight dark hair looked very like any other similar young man when the individuality of life was quenched. They did not even have to have the same colour of eyes. A parent receives a message saying: Your son is dead as the result of a regrettable accident; would you please identify him as your son and arrange for the burial. The bereaved parent is presented with his dead son's papers and belongings and is asked to identify the owner as his son. There is no question in his conditioned mind; he accepts what he sees, and what he sees is what he expected to see. It would not occur to him to say: Are this man's eyes blue or brown?

In the end, of course, it was Grant who submitted to questioning. Why was he interested in Charles? Had Charles after all left some money? Was it that Grant was looking for the legal heirs, perhaps?

No, Grant had promised to look Charles up on behalf of a friend who had known him on the Persian Gulf coast. No, he did not know what the friend wanted of him. He understood that there was some suggestion of a future partnership.

In the expressed opinion of the Martin family the friend was lucky.

They gave him Armagnac and coffee and little biscuits with Bath-bun sugar on them, and asked him to come again if he was ever in Toulon

On the doorstep he asked if they had possession of their son's papers. Only his personal ones, they said: his letters. The official ones they had not bothered with or thought about. They were no doubt still with the Marseilles police, who had first made contact with

them when the accident happened.

So a little more time was wasted in making friends with the Marseilles officials; but this time Grant spent no energy on conscientiously-unofficial methods. He produced his credentials and asked for a loan of the papers. He drank a *sirop*, and signed a receipt. And he caught the afternoon plane to London on Friday afternoon.

He had two more days. Or one day and a Sunday, to be accurate.

France was still a jewelled pattern as he flew back over it, but Britain seemed to have disappeared altogether. Beyond the familiar outline of the western European coast there was nothing but an ocean of haze. Very odd and incomplete the map looked without the familiar shape of that very individual island. Supposing there never had been that island: how different would the history of the world have been? It was a fascinating speculation. An all-Spanish America, one supposed. A French India; an India without a colour-bar and so racially intermarried that it had lost its identity. A Dutch South Africa ruled by a fanatic Church. Australia? Who would have discovered and colonised Australia? The Dutch from South Africa, or the Spaniards from America? It was immaterial, he supposed, since either race would in a generation have become tall, lean, tough, nasal, drawling, sceptical and indestructible. Just as all Americans eventually began to look like Red Indians even if they entered the country as broad large-boned Saxons.

They dropped into the ocean of cloud and found Britain again. A very mundane, muddy, and workaday place to have changed the history of a world. A steady drizzle soaked the land and the lieges. London was a water-colour of grey reflections with spots of vermilion oil paint where the buses plunged dripping through the haze.

All the lights were on in the finger-print department although it was still daylight; and Cartwright was sitting just as he had last seen him—as he had always seen him—with a half-drunk cup of cold tea at his elbow, the saucer filled with cigarette butts.

'Something I can do for you this beautiful spring afternoon?' Cartwright said.

'Yes. There is one thing I want very much to know. Have you ever drunk the second half of a cup of tea?'

Cartwright considered this. 'Come to think of it, I don't know that I ever have. Beryl usually takes my cup away and fills it up with fresh stuff. Something else off the cuff? Or is this just a social call?'

'Yes, something else. But you'll be *working* for me on Monday, so don't let your sense of benevolence get out of hand.' He put Charles Martin's papers on the table. 'When can you do these for me?'

'What is this? French identity papers. What are you getting into—or do you want to keep it to yourself?'

'I'm just having one last bet on a horse called Flair. If it comes off I'll tell you about it. I'll pick up the prints tomorrow morning.'

He looked at the clock and reckoned that if Tad Cullen was 'dating' Daphne, or any other female creature, tonight, he would at this moment be dolling himself up in his hotel room. He left Cartwright and went to a telephone where he could talk unheard.

"We-e-ll!" said Tad joyously, when he heard Grant's voice. "Where are you talking from? Are you back?"

'Yes, I'm back. I'm in London. Look, Tad, you say you've never known anyone called Charles Martin. But is it possible that you knew him under another name? Did you ever know a very good mechanic, very good with cars, who was French and looked a little like Bill?'

Tad thought this over.

'I don't think I've ever known any mechanic who was French. I've known a Swedish mechanic and a Greek mechanic, but neither of them was in the least like Bill. Why?'

'Because Martin worked in the Middle East. And it is just possible that Bill got those papers from him before he ever came to Britain at all. Martin may have sold them to him. He was—is: he may be living—a lazy creature and probably very hard-up at intervals. Out there, where no one bothers very much about credentials, he might have tried to cash them.'

'Yes; he might. Someone else's papers are usually more valuable than your own out there. To have around, I mean. But why would *Bill* buy them? Bill never did anything on the side.'

'Perhaps because he looked a little like Martin. I don't know. Anyhow, you yourself have never run into anyone like Martin in the Middle East?'

'Not anywhere, that I can think of. What did you get? Out of the Martins. Anything worth while?'

'I'm afraid not. They showed me photographs; which made it clear how much he would look like Bill if he was not alive. Something that we knew already. And of course the fact that he had gone East to work. Any answers to the advertisement?'

- 'Five.'
- 'Five?'
- 'All from fellows called Bill Kenrick.'
- 'Oh. Asking what was in it for them?'
- 'You've got it.'
- 'Not a word from anyone who knew him?'
- 'Not a peep. And nothing at the Charles Martin end either, it seems. We're sunk, aren't we?'
- 'Well—waterlogged, shall we say. We have one remaining asset.'
- 'We have? What is that?'
- 'Time. We have forty-eight more hours.'
- 'Mr Grant, you're an optimist.'

'You have to be in my business,' Grant said, but he did not feel very optimistic. He felt flat and tired. He was within an ace of wishing that he had never heard of Bill Kenrick. Wishing that he had come down that corridor at Scoone just ten seconds later. In ten more seconds Yughourt would have realised that the man was dead and would have shut the door and gone for help; and he, Grant, would have walked down that empty corridor and stepped down on to the platform unaware that there had ever existed a young man called Bill Kenrick. He would never have known that anyone had died on the train. He would have driven away with Tommy to the hills, and no words about singing sands would have disturbed his holiday. He would have fished in peace, and finished his holiday in peace.

In too much peace—perhaps? With too much time to think about himself and his bondage to unreason. Too much time to take his own mental and spiritual pulse.

No, of course he was not sorry that he had heard of Bill Kenrick. He was Bill Kenrick's debtor as long as he lived, and if it took him till the end of his days he would find out what had changed Bill Kenrick into Charles Martin. But if only he could clear up this thing before he was swamped by that demanding life that was waiting for him on Monday.

He asked how Daphne was, and Tad said that as a female companion she had one enormous advantage over everyone he had ever known: she was pleased with very little. If you gave her a bunch of violets she was as pleased as most girls are with orchids. It was Tad's considered opinion that she had never heard of orchids, and he, personally, had no intention of bringing them to her notice.

'She sounds the domestic type. You take care, Tad, or she'll be going back to the Middle East with you.'

'Not while I'm conscious,' Tad said. 'No female is going back East with me. I'm not having any little-woman-round-the-house cluttering up *our* bungalow. I mean, my bun—. I mean—' His voice died away.

The conversation became suddenly broken-backed, and Grant rang off after promising to call him as soon as he had anything to report or an idea to share.

He went out into the wet haze, bought himself an evening paper, and found a taxi to take him home. The paper was a *Signal*, and the sight of the familiar heading took him back to that breakfast at Scoone four weeks ago. He thought again how constant in kind the headlines were. The Cabinet row, the dead body of the blonde in Maida Vale, the Customs prosecution, the hold-up, the arrival of an American actor, the street accident. Even 'PLANE CRASH IN ALPS' was common enough to rank as a constant.

'Yesterday evening the dwellers in the high valleys of Chamonix saw a rose of flame break out on the icy summit of Mont Blanc

The Signal's style was constant too.

The only thing waiting for him at 19 Tenby Court was a letter from Pat, which said:

Dear Alan, they say you must have marjuns but I think marjuns is havers. waste not want not. this is a fly I made for you. it was not done in time before you went. it may not be any good for those english rivers but you better have it anyway your affectionate cousin Patrick

This production cheered Grant considerably, and while he ate his dinner he considered alternately the economy, in capitals as well as in margins, and the enclosed lure. The fly exceeded in originality even that remarkable affair which he had been lent at Clune. He decided to use it on the Severn on a day when they would 'take' a piece of red rubber hot-water-bottle, so that he could write honestly to Pat and report that the Rankin fly had landed a big one.

The typical Scots insularity in 'those English rivers' made him hope that Laura would not wait too long before sending Pat away to his English school. The quality of Scotchness was a highly concentrated essence, and should always be diluted. As an ingredient it was admirable; neat, it was as abominable as ammonia.

He stuck the fly above the calendar on his desk, so that he might go on being amused by its catholicity and warmed by his young cousin's devotion, and got thankfully into pyjamas and a dressing-gown. There was at least one consolation for being in town when he might still be in the country: he could get into a dressing-gown and put his feet on the mantelpiece in the sure and certain knowledge that no telephone call from Whitehall 1212 would intrude on his leisure.

But he had not had his feet up for twenty minutes when Whitehall 1212 was on the telephone.

It was Cartwright.

'Did I understand you to say that you had had a bet on Flair?' said Cartwright's voice.

'Yes. Why?'

'I don't know anything about it but I have an idea that your horse has won,' said Cartwright. He added, very silky and sweet like a Broadcasting Aunt: 'Good night, sir,' and hung up.

'Hey!' said Grant, and jiggled the telephone key. 'Hey!'

But Cartwright had gone. And it would be no use trying to bring him to the telephone any more tonight. This amiable piece of teasing was Cartwright's come-back; his charge for doing a couple of buckshee jobs.

Grant went back to his Runyon, but he could no longer keep his attention on that strictly legit character, Judge Henry G. Blake. Blast Cartwright and his little jokes. Now he would have to go to the Yard first thing in the morning.

But in the morning he forgot all about Cartwright.

By eight o'clock in the morning Cartwright had sunk back into the great ocean of incidentals that bear us on from one day to the next, unremarkable in their plankton swarming.

The morning began as it always did, with the rattle of china and the voice of Mrs Tinker as she set down his early-morning tea. This was the preliminary to four glorious minutes during which he lay still more asleep than awake and let his tea cool, so Mrs Tinker's voice came to him down a long tunnel that led to life and the daylight but need not yet be traversed.

'Just listen to it,' Mrs Tinker's voice said, referring apparently to the steady beat of the rain. 'Stair rods, cats and dogs, reservoyers. Niagara also ran. Seems they've bin and found Shangri-la. I could do with a spot of Shangri-la myself this morning.'

The word turned over in his sleepy mind like a weed in calm water. Shangri-la. Very soporific. Very soporific. Shangri-la. Some place in a film. In a novel. Some unspoiled Eden. Shut away from the world.

'According to this mornin's papers they never 'ave no rain at all there.'

'Where?' he said, to show that he was awake.

'Arabia, so it seems.'

He heard the door close and dropped a little further under the surface of things for the enjoyment of those four minutes. Arabia. Arabia. Another soporific. They had found Shangri-la in Arabia. They—

Arabia

In one great whirl of blankets he came to the surface and reached for the papers. There were two, but it was the *Clarion* that came to his hand first because it was the *Clarion* whose headlines constituted Mrs Tinker's daily dose of reading.

He did not have to search for it. It was there on the front page. It was the best front-page stuff that any newspaper had had since Crippen.

SHANGRI-LA REALLY EXISTS. SENSATIONAL DISCOVERY, HISTORIC FIND IN ARABIA.

He glanced over the hysterically excited paragraphs and discarded the paper impatiently for the more trustworthy *Morning News*. But the *Morning News* was almost as excited as the *Clarion*. KINSEY-HEWITT'S GREAT FIND, said the *Morning News*. ASTOUNDING NEWS FROM ARABIA.

'We print, with great pride, Paul Kinsey-Hewitt's own despatch,' said the *Morning News*. 'As our readers will see his discovery had been vouched for by three R.A.F. planes sent to locate the place after Mr Kinsey-Hewitt's arrival at Makallah.' The *Morning News* had had a contract with Kinsey-Hewitt for a series of articles on his present journey, when that journey should be completed, and was now delirious with pleasure at its unexpected luck.

He skipped the Morning News on its own triumph and went on to the far soberer prose of the triumphant explorer himself.

'We were in the Empty Quarter on scientific errands...no thought in our minds of human history either factual or legendary...a well-explored country...bare mountains that no one had ever considered climbing...a waste of time between one well and the next...in a land where water is life no one turns aside to climb precipitous heights...attention caught by a plane that came twice in five days and spent some time circling low above the mountains...occurred to us that some plane had crashed...possible rescue...conference...Rory Hallard and I to search while Daoud went on to the well at Zaruba and brought a load of water back to meet us...no entrance apparent...walls like the Garbh Coire on Braeriach...giving up...Rory...a track that even a goat would baulk at...two hours to the ridge...a valley of astounding beauty...green almost shocking...kind of tamarisk...architecture reminiscent of Greece rather than Arabia...colonnades...light-skinned Persian type with fine eyes...the grace and small bones of an inbred race...very friendly...greatly excited by the appearance of the plane which they seemed to have taken to be some kind of bird...paved squares and streets...oddly metropolitan...isolation due not to the difficulties of the mountain track but to lack of animal transport to carry water...desert impassable without that...in the position of a small island in an ocean of desert...as unaware what lay beyond that desert or how far it might extend as the Ancients were of what lay beyond the Atlantic...tradition of disaster, but owing to language difficulties this is surmise, being a translation of sign-talk rather than...strip cultivation...monkey god in stone...Wabar...volcanic convulsion... Wabar...Vabar...'

The *Morning News* had inset a neat outline map of Arabia with crosses in the appropriate place.

Grant lay and stared at it.

So that was what Bill Kenrick had seen.

He had come out of the shouting heart of the storm, out of the whirling sand and the darkness, and looked down at that green civilised valley lying among the rocks. Not much wonder that he had come back looking 'concussed', looking as if his mind were 'still back there'. He had not quite believed it himself. He had gone back to search; to look for, and eventually look at, this place that appeared on no map. This—this—was his Paradise.

This was what he had been writing about on the blank space of an evening paper.

This was what he had come to England to—

To Heron Lloyd to-

To Heron Lloyd—!

He flung the *News* away and leaped out of bed.

'Tink!' he called as he turned on the bath-water. 'Tink, never mind breakfast. Get me some coffee.'

'But you can't go out on a morning like this with just a cup of—'

'Don't argue! Get me some coffee!'

The water roared into the bath. The liar. The god-damned smooth heartless lime-hogging liar. The vain vicious murdering liar. How had he done it?

By God, he would see that he hanged for this.

'On what evidence?' said his inner voice, nasty-polite.

'You shut up! I'll get the evidence if I have to discover a whole new continent to find it! "Poor boy! Poor boy!" said he, shaking his head over so sad a fate. Sweet Christ, I'll hang for him myself if I can't kill him any other way!'

'Calm down, calm down. That's no mood to interview a suspect in.'

'I'm not interviewing a suspect, blast your police mind. I'm going to tell Heron Lloyd what I think of him. I'm not a police-officer until after I've dealt personally with Lloyd.'

'You can't hit a man of sixty.'

'I'm not going to hit him. I'm going to half-murder him. The ethics of hitting or not hitting don't enter into the matter at all.'

'He may be worth hanging for but not worth being requested to resign for.'

"I found him delightful," said he, kind and patronising. The bastard. The smooth vain murdering bastard. The—'

From the wells of his experience he dredged up words to serve his need. But his anger went on consuming him like a furnace.

He flung out of the house after two mouthfuls of toast and three gulps of coffee, and went round to the garage at the double. It was too early to hope for a taxi; the quickest way was to use his car.

Would Lloyd have read the papers yet?

If he did not normally leave the house before eleven o'clock, then surely breakfast could not be until nine. He would like very much to be at 5 Britt Lane before Lloyd opened his morning paper. It would be sweet, consoling sweet, satisfying sweet, to watch Lloyd take the news. He had murdered to keep that secret his own, to ensure that the glory should be his, and now the secret was front-page news and the glory belonged to his rival. Oh, Sweet Jesus, let him not have read about it yet.

He rang twice at 5 Britt Lane before his summons was answered, and then it was answered not by the amiable Mahmoud but by a large woman in felt slippers.

'Mr Lloyd?' he asked.

- 'Oh, Mr Lloyd's up in Cumberland for a day or two.'
- 'Cumberland! When did he go to Cumberland?'
- 'Thursday afternoon.'
- 'When do you expect him back?'
- 'Oh, they've just gone for a day or two.'
- 'They? Mahmoud too.'
- 'Of course Mahmoud too. Mr Lloyd he doesn't go anywhere without Mahmoud goes with him.'
- 'I see. Can you give me his address?'
- 'I'd give it you if I had it. But they don't bother with re-addressing when they go for only a day or two. Will you leave a message? Or will you call back, perhaps? They'll like as not arrive back this afternoon.'

No, he would not leave a message. He would come back. His name did not matter.

He felt like someone who has braked too suddenly and been hit in the wind. As he went out to his car he remembered that Tad Cullen would read that story in a few minutes' time; if he had not read it already. He went back to the flat and was met in the lobby by a relieved Mrs Tinker.

'Thank heaven you're back. That American boy's been on the phone and goin' on somethink awful. I can't make 'ead or tail of what 'e thinks he's talkin' about. Ravin' mad, 'e is. I says: Mr Grant'll ring you, I says, the minute 'e come in, but 'e can't leave the phone alone. Just puts it down an' picks it up again. I bin running backwards and forwards between the sink and the phone like a—' The telephone rang. 'There you are! There 'e is again!'

Grant picked up the receiver. It was indeed Tad, and he was all that Mrs Tinker had said. He was incoherent with rage.

'But he lied!' he kept saying. 'That guy lied. Of course Bill told him all that!'

'Yes, of course he did. Listen Tad...Listen...No, you can't go and beat him to a jelly...Yes, of course you can find his house for yourself; I don't doubt it, but...Listen, Tad!...I've been to his house...Oh, yes, even at this hour of the morning. I read my papers earlier than you do...No, I didn't beat him up. I couldn't...No, not because I'm windy but because he's in Cumberland...Yes. Since Thursday...I don't know. I'll have to think about it. Give me until lunch-time. Do you trust my judgement on things in general?...Well, you'll have to trust it in this. I must have time to think...To think up some evidence, of course...It's customary...I'll tell my story to the Yard, of course, and of course they will believe me. I mean, my story of Bill's visit to Lloyd, and Lloyd's lies to me. But proving that Charles Martin was Bill Kenrick is quite a different matter. Until lunch-time I shall be writing out a statement for the Yard. Come about one o'clock and we can have lunch together. In the afternoon I must turn the whole thing over to the authorities.'

He hated the thought. This was his own private fight. It had been his own private fight from the very beginning. From that moment when he had looked down through the open compartment door on to the dead face of an unknown boy. It was a thousand times more his private fight since his meeting with Lloyd.

He had begun to write, when he remembered that he had not yet picked up the papers he had left with Cartwright. He lifted the receiver, dialled the number, and asked for Cartwright's extension. Could Cartwright possibly find a messenger to send round with those papers? He, Grant, was frantically busy. It was Saturday, and he was clearing up before going back to work on Monday. He would be very grateful.

He went back to his writing, and became so absorbed that he was conscious only in a dim way that Mrs Tinker had brought in the second post: the noon one. It was when he raised his glance from the paper to search his mind for a word, that his eye fell on the envelope she had laid beside him on the desk. It was a foolscap envelope, rather stiff and expensive, well-filled, and addressed in a thin, angular cramped hand that managed to be at once finicking and flamboyant.

Grant had never seen Heron Lloyd's handwriting. He recognised it instantly.

He put down his pen; cautiously, as if the strange letter was a bomb and any undue vibration might send it off.

He wiped his palms down the thighs of his trousers in a gesture he had not used since he was a child, the gesture of a small boy facing the incalculable, and put out his hand for the envelope.

It had been posted in London.

The letter was dated Thursday morning.

My Dear Mr Grant,

Or should I say Inspector? Oh, yes, I know about that. It did not take me long to find out. My excellent Mahmoud is a better detective than any of your well-meaning amateurs on the Embankment. But I shall not give you your rank, because this is a social communication. I write to you as one unique human being to another worthy of his attention. Indeed, it is because you are the only Englishman who has ever moved me to even a momentary admiration that I present these facts to you and not to the Press.

And because, of course, I am sure of your interest.

I have this morning had a letter from my follower, Paul Kinsey-Hewitt, announcing his discovery in Arabia. The letter was sent from the *Morning News* office at his request, to anticipate the publication of the news tomorrow morning. A piece of courtesy for which I am grateful to him. It is ironic that it should have been the Kenrick youth who was responsible for bringing to him, too, the knowledge of the valley's existence. I saw a great deal of the Kenrick youth while he was in London and I could find nothing in him worthy of so great a destiny. He was a very common-place young man. He spent his days flying a mechanical contraption mindlessly across deserts that men had conquered only with suffering and resolution. He was full of a plan whereby I should provide the transport and he should lead me to this find of his. But that of course was absurd. I have not lived my life and made a great name in the desert to be led to discovery by an instrument-watcher from the back streets of Portsmouth; to be a transport provider, a camel-hirer, for some other man's convenience. It was not to be thought of that a youth who by a climatic hazard, a geographical accident, had stumbled on one of the great discoveries of the world should be allowed to profit by it at the expense of men who had given their lives to exploration.

As far as I could judge, the young man's only virtue (why do you waste your interest on so dull a piece of human mass-production?) was a capacity for continence. In speech, of course; please don't misunderstand me. And it was important from my point of view that the tongue which he had held with so rare a continence should go on being unwagged.

Since he had arranged to meet another of his kind in Paris on the 4th (poor beautiful Lutetia, for ever raped by the barbarian) I had a little less than a fortnight to contrive this. I did not in fact need the fortnight. I could have achieved my end in two days if necessary.

I had once, when travelling to Scotland by night, stayed awake to write some letters and post them at Crewe when the train would reach its first stop. I had thought then, as I sat looking at the platform after getting rid of my letters, how easy it would be to leave the train unobserved. The attendant stepped out to receive late-joining passengers and then went away on affairs of his own. There was a long wait at a quite deserted platform while luggage was loaded into the distant vans. If one had managed to travel so far unaccounted for, one could step off the train and no one would ever know that one had been on it.

That memory was the first of the two props for my inspiration.

The second was my possession of Charles Martin's papers.

Charles Martin was my mechanic. He was the only European and the only technician (what an appropriately deplorable word!) ever employed by me. I engaged him for the least successful of my expeditions, the semi-mechanised one, because my Arabs (though learning rapidly, alas!) were not skilful with machinery. He was a repellent creature, interested in nothing but internal combustion and the avoidance of his share of camp duties, and I was not sorry when he died in mid-desert. We had by that time found the vehicles a liability rather than a help and had decided to abandon them, so Martin had already outlived his usefulness. (No, I had nothing to do with his death; Heaven in this instance did its own scavenging.) No one asked for his papers, and since the journey was from coast to coast we never returned to the town in which I had engaged him. His papers lay in my baggage, a matter of no interest to me or to anyone else, and came back to England with me.

I remembered them when it was necessary to silence the Kenrick youth. Kenrick looked not too unlike Charles Martin.

It was Kenrick's plan to go back to his Carter-Paterson occupation in the East until such time as I should join him there, and we should then set out on our expedition together. He came to see me at Britt Lane very often, to discuss routes and plume himself on the prospect in front of him, and it amused me to see him sit there and babble his nonsense when I had so strange a translation prepared for him.

He had arranged to go to Paris by the night-ferry on the 3rd. He 'collected' ferries, it seemed. He would go many miles out of his way to be punted across a stream which he could have crossed by a bridge a few yards from where he was standing. The Dover ferry was to be his two-hundredth, I think. When he told me that he had booked a berth on the train-ferry I telephoned, as soon as he had gone, and booked a berth to Scoone in the name of Charles Martin for the same night.

When I next saw him I suggested that since I was going to Scotland on the same evening on which he was leaving for Paris, he should leave his luggage (he had only two suitcases) in the cloak-room at Victoria, dine early with me at Britt Lane, and see me off at Euston.

He was always delighted to fall in with any suggestion that I was moved to put to him, and he agreed, as I knew he would, to this. We dined, on a rice and cutlets and apricots dish that Mahmoud has taught Mrs Lucas to make (it needs long cooking so that the dish is impregnated with the flavour of the apricots) and Mahmoud drove us to Euston. At Euston I sent Kenrick to pick up my sleeper ticket while I went ahead. By the time Kenrick rejoined me I had found my compartment and was waiting on the platform for his arrival. If by chance he wondered why I was travelling as Charles Martin I had the excuse of my fame to account for an incognito. But he made no comment

I felt that the gods were on my side when I saw that the attendant was Old Yughourt. You will not know Old Yughourt. He has never in the whole course of his career been known to take an interest in any passenger whatever, his chief object when on duty being

to retire to his own unsavoury compartment at the earliest possible moment and go to sleep there.

We had less than five minutes before the train was due to depart. We stood talking for a little with the door half-closed, Kenrick facing the corridor. Presently he said that he had better get out, or he might be carried to the Highlands. I indicated my small overnight case which was lying beside him on the bunk and said: 'If you open my case you'll find something in it for you. A keepsake till we meet again.'

He bent over, with an almost childish eagerness, to unfasten the two locks. The position was perfect. I took from my pocket the most satisfactory weapon ever devised by man for the destruction of his unsuspecting enemy. Primitive man in desert countries had neither knife nor rifle, but he made the sand serve. A rag and a few handfuls of sand, and a skull would crack like an egg-shell; very neatly it would crack, without blood or fuss. He gave a small grunt and fell forward over the case. I shut and locked the door and looked to see if his nose was bleeding. It was not. I dragged him off the berth and bundled him under it. This was my only miscalculation. One half of the space under the berth was occupied by some permanent obstruction, and thin and slight as he was his knees could not be pushed back out of sight. I took off my own coat and flung it on the berth so that it hung over and hid his legs. As I arranged the folds in a manner at once concealing and suitably casual, the whistle went. I put the outward half of my ticket to Scoone, together with my sleeper ticket, on the small shelf below the mirror where Yughourt would see it, and walked down the corridor to the lavatory. No one had interest for anything but the moment of leave-taking. I shut myself into the lavatory and waited.

About twenty minutes later I heard the successive closing of doors that meant that Yughourt was making his rounds. When I heard him in the compartment next door I began to wash, noisily. He tapped at the door a few moments later and asked if I were the passenger in B Seven. I said that I was. He announced that he had found my tickets and taken them. I heard him go through to the next coach and begin his door-slamming, and I walked back to B Seven and locked myself in.

After that I had three uninterrupted hours to make all perfect.

If you ever want to be sure of uninterrupted peace, my dear Mr Grant, buy yourself a sleeper ticket to the North of Scotland. There is nowhere in this world where one is so safe from interruption as one is in a sleeping compartment once the attendant has done his round. Not even in the desert.

I retrieved Kenrick from below the bunk, rubbed his head on the edge of the wash-hand basin, and laid him on the bunk. An examination of his clothes showed a gratifying cosmopolitanism. His underclothes seemed to be dhobi-washed, his suit made in Hong Kong, and his shoes in Karachi. His watch was a cheap metal one with neither name nor initials.

I removed the contents of his pockets and substituted Charles Martin's pocket-book and its contents.

He was still alive, but he stopped breathing as we were running through the yards at Rugby.

From then on I dressed the set, as they say in the theatre. And I don't think that I missed anything; did I, Mr Grant? The details were perfect, even to the crushed hairs in the wash-hand basin and the dusty palms of his hands. In the case that I was leaving behind were old clothes of my own, well-worn and washed, and of a type that he was in the habit of wearing; and such Frenchness as I had been able to supply from my own store: a novel and a Testament. The case also, of course, contained the all-important bottle.

Kenrick had an extraordinarily hard head. I refer to the matter of drink, of course, not to the results of sand-bagging. I had plied him with whisky at dinner, and had offered him a stirrup-cup of such dimensions that any other man would have blenched at the prospect. He did indeed look at the half-tumbler of neat whisky a little doubtfully, but, as I have said, he was always anxious to please me and he drank it down without protest. He remained sober; or to all appearances sober. But both his blood and his stomach would be whisky-sodden when he died.

So was his compartment when I had finished with it. As the lights of Crewe began to go by I put the final touch. I laid the half-full bottle on the floor and rolled it to and fro over the carpet. As the train slowed down I unlocked the door, shut it behind me, walked away down the train until I had several coaches between me and B Seven, stood looking in a casual, interested way at the traffic on the platform, stepped, still casual, down on to that platform and strolled along it. In hat and coat I did not look like a passenger and no one took any notice of me.

I came back to London on the midnight train, arriving at Euston at half-past three, and was so exhilarated that I walked all the way home. I walked as if on air. I let myself in, and was sleeping peacefully when Mahmoud came to call me at seven-thirty and to remind me that I had an appointment to entertain Pathé representatives at half-past nine.

It was not until you called to see me that I knew about the scribbled words on the newspaper that had been in his coat pocket. I admit that I was for a moment dismayed that I should have overlooked anything at all, but I was instantly comforted by the venial nature of the slip. It did not in any way detract from nor endanger my unique achievement. I had let him keep his deplorable rag, as a piece of set-dressing. That it proved to have Kenrick's handwriting on it would not be of interest to authorities who had accepted the young man as Charles Martin.

The following evening, at the rush hour, I drove myself to Victoria and retrieved Kenrick's two cases from the cloak-room. I took them home, removed from them all maker's marks and easily identifiable articles, sewed them both up in canvas, and sent them with their contents to a refugee organisation in the Near East. If you ever want to get rid of anything, my dear Mr Grant, do not burn it. Post it to a remote island in the South Seas.

Having seen to it that the admirably reticent tongue of the Kenrick youth would stay reticent, I looked forward to enjoying the fruits of my labours. Indeed, yesterday I had assurance of sufficient backing for my new expedition, and had planned to fly out next week. The letter from Kinsey-Hewitt this morning alters all that, of course. The fruits of my achievement have been taken from me. But no one can take from me the achievement itself. If I cannot be known as the discoverer of Wabar, I shall be known as the author of the only perfect murder ever perpetrated.

I cannot stay to be a candle-holder at Kinsey-Hewitt's triumph. And I am too old to have more triumphs of my own. But I *can* light a blaze that will make the candles on the Kinsey-Hewitt altar look small and pale and uninteresting. My funeral pyre will be a beacon to light all Europe, and my achievement in murder a tidal-wave that will sweep Kinsey-Hewitt and Wabar into the waste-paper baskets of the world's Press.

This evening, at dusk, I light my own pyre, on the highest slope of the highest mountain in Europe. Mahmoud does not know this.

He thinks we are flying out to Athens. But he has been with me for many years and would be very unhappy without me. So I am taking him with me

Good-bye, my dear Mr Grant. It grieves me that someone of your intelligence should be wasting his talents in that rather stupid establishment on the Embankment. It was clever of you to discover that Charles Martin was not Charles Martin but someone called Kenrick, and I salute you. What you are not clever enough to discover is that he did not die by accident. What no one would ever be clever enough to discover is that I am the man who killed him.

Please take this letter as a mark of my esteem and *pour prendre congé*. Mrs Lucas will post this on Friday morning.

H. C. Heron Lloyd.

Grant became aware that Mrs Tinker was showing Tad Cullen into the room, and that she must already have been in without his noticing because the envelope from the Yard was lying beside him on the desk.

'Well?' said Tad, his face still thunderous. 'Where do we go from here?'

Grant pushed over the pages of Lloyd's letter for him to read.

'What's all this?'

'Read it.'

Tad took the thing up doubtfully, looked for a signature, and then fell on the manuscript. Grant put his thumb in the envelope from Cartwright and broke it open.

When Tad had finished he looked up with a shocked face and stared at Grant. When at last he spoke what he said was: 'I feel dirty all over.'

'Yes. It is an evil thing.'

'Vanity.'

'Yes.'

'That's the crash that was in the evening papers last night. The crate in flames on Mont Blanc.'

'Yes

'So he would have got away with it after all.'

'No

'No? He had thought of everything, hadn't he?'

'They never think of everything.'

'They?'

'Murderers. Lloyd forgot so obvious a thing as finger-prints.'

'You mean he didn't do that job in gloves? I don't believe it!'

'Of course he did it in gloves. Nothing he touched in that compartment would have any print of his. What he forgot was that there was something in that compartment that he had handled before.'

'What was that?'

'Charles Martin's papers.' Grant flipped them with his finger-tip where they lay on the desk. 'They are covered with Lloyd's prints. They never think of everything.'

- 'You look like a bridegroom,' Sergeant Williams said in great satisfaction, pump-handling Grant on Monday morning.
- 'Well, I'd better go and have rice thrown at me, I suppose. How is the old man's rheumatism this morning?'
- 'Oh, fairly good, I think.'
- 'What is he smoking? A pipe? Or cigarettes?'
- 'Oh, a pipe.'
- 'Then I'd better go in while the barometer is still high.'
- In the passage he encountered Ted Hanna.
- 'How did you run into Archie Brown?' Hanna asked, when he had greeted him.
- 'He's writing a Gaelic epic in the hotel at the place where I was staying. And his "ravens", by the way, are foreign fishing-boats.'
- 'Yes?' said Hanna, stiffening into interest. 'How do you know?'
- 'They got together at a party. It was the old "have-a-cigarette-no-no-keep-the-packet" routine.'
- 'Sure it wasn't cigarettes?'
- 'Quite sure. I picked his pocket in the course of one Grand Chain and unpicked it next time round.'
- 'Don't tell me you've been country dancing!'
- 'You'd be surprised at the things that I've been doing. I'm a little surprised myself.'
- 'What was the "bread" like?'
- 'A packetful of the most beautiful "large coarse" notes you ever saw.'
- 'Yes?' Hanna said, thoughtfully; and then amusement grew in his face and spread to a grin. 'Someone's wasting an awful lot of the needful.'
 - 'Yes. A sheep in wolf's clothing. And you should see the clothing!' Grant said and moved on towards his Chief's door.
 - 'Your holiday seems to have done you good,' Hanna said. 'I've never seen you so on top of the world. You're positively purring.'
 - 'As they say in the far North, I wouldn't call the King my cousin,' Grant said, and meant it.

He was happy not because of the report that he was going to give Bryce, not even because he was his own man again; he was happy because of something young Cullen had said to him at the airport that morning.

'Mr Grant,' Tad had said, standing very straight and solemn and making a formal little speech of leave-taking like a well-broughtup American, 'I want you to know that I'll never forget what you've done for me and Bill. You couldn't bring Bill back to me, but you've done something much more wonderful: you've made him immortal.'

And indeed that was just what he had done. As long as books were written and history read, Bill Kenrick would live; and it was he, Alan Grant, who had done that. They had buried Bill Kenrick six feet deep in oblivion, but he, Alan Grant, had dug him up again and set him in his rightful place as the discoverer of Wabar.

He had paid back the debt he owed that dead boy in B Seven.

Bryce greeted him amiably, and said that he was looking well (which didn't count, because he had said that at their last interview) and suggested that he might go down to Hampshire in answer to an appeal from the Hampshire police which had just come in.

'Well, if it's all the same to you, sir, I'd like to get the Kenrick murder off my chest first.'

'The what?

'This is my written report on it,' Grant said, laying in front of Bryce the neat bundle of quarto pages that was the product of his pleasant Sunday at home.

As he laid the thing down he remembered in a vague, surprised way that what he had planned to lay in front of Bryce was his resignation.

What odd notions occurred to one on holiday.

He was going to resign, and be a sheep farmer or something, and get married.

What an extraordinary idea. What a most extraordinary idea.

Josephine Jey MISS PYM DISPOSES

"Ingenious, stimulating and very enjoyable."

Sunday Times

THE CLASSIC MYSTERY WRITER

A bell clanged. Brazen, insistent, maddening.

Through the quiet corridors came the din of it, making hideous the peace of the morning. From each of the yawning windows of the little quadrangle the noise poured out on to the still, sunlit garden where the grass was grey yet with dew.

Little Miss Pym stirred, opened one doubtful grey eye, and reached blindly for her watch. There was no watch. She opened the other eye. There seemed to be no bedside table either. No, of course not; now she remembered. There was no bedside table; as she had found last night. Her watch had had of necessity to be put under her pillow. She fumbled for it. Good heavens, what a row that bell was making! Obscene. There seemed to be no watch under the pillow. But it must be there! She lifted the pillow bodily, revealing only one small sheer-linen handkerchief in a saucy pattern of blue-and-white. She dropped the pillow and peered down between the bed and the wall. Yes, there was something that looked like a watch. By lying flat on her front and inserting an arm she could just reach it. Carefully she brought it up, lightly caught between the tips of first and second fingers. If she dropped it now she would have to get out of bed and crawl under for it. She turned on her back with a sigh of relief, holding the watch triumphantly above her.

Half-past five, said the watch.

Half-past five!

Miss Pym stopped breathing and stared in unbelieving fascination. No, really, did any college, however physical and hearty, begin the day at *half-past five!* Anything was possible, of course, in a community which had use for neither bedside tables nor bedside lamps, but-half-past five! She put the watch to her small pink ear. It ticked faithfully. She squinted round her pillow at the garden which was visible from the window behind her bed. Yes, it certainly was early; the world had that unmoving just-an-apparition look of early morning. Well, well!

Henrietta had said last night, standing large and majestical in the doorway: "Sleep well. The students enjoyed your lecture, my dear. I shall see you in the morning;" but had not seen fit to mention half-past-five bells.

Oh, well. It wasn't her funeral, thank goodness. Once upon a time she too had lived a life regulated by bells, but that was long ago. Nearly twenty years ago. When a bell rang in Miss Pym's life now it was because she had put a delicately varnished finger-tip on the bell-push. As the clamour died into a complaining whimper and then into silence, she turned over to face the wall, burrowing happily into her pillow. Not her funeral. Dew on the grass, and all that, was for youth: shining resplendent youth; and they could have it. She was having another two hours' sleep.

Very childlike she looked with her round pink face, her neat little button of a nose, and her brown hair rolled in flat invisible-pinned curls all over her head. They had cost her a spiritual struggle last night, those curls. She had been very tired after the train journey, and meeting Henrietta again, and the lecture; and her weaker self had pointed out that she would in all probability be leaving after lunch on the morrow, that her permanent wave was only two months old, and that her hair might very well be left unpinned for one night. But, partly to spite her weaker self with whom she waged a constant and bitter war, partly so that she might do Henrietta justice, she had seen to it that fourteen pins were pressed to their nightly duty. She was remembering her strong-mindedness now (it helped to cancel out any twinge of conscience about her self-indulgence this morning) and marvelling at the survival of that desire to live up to Henrietta. At school, she, the little fourth-form rabbit, had admired the sixth-form Henrietta extravagantly. Henrietta was the born Head Girl. Her talent lay exclusively in seeing that other people employed theirs. That was why, although she had left school to train in secretarial work, she was now Principal of a college of physical culture; a subject of which she knew nothing at all. She had forgotten all about Lucy Pym, just as Lucy had forgotten about her, until Miss Pym had written The Book.

That is how Lucy herself thought of it. The Book.

She was still a little surprised about The Book herself. Her mission in life had been to teach schoolgirls to speak French. But after four years of that her remaining parent had died, leaving her two hundred and fifty pounds a year, and Lucy had dried her eyes with one hand and given in her resignation with the other. The Headmistress had pointed out with envy and all uncharitableness that investments were variable things, and that two hundred and fifty didn't leave much margin for a civilised and cultured existence such as people in Lucy's position were expected to live. But Lucy had resigned all the same, and had taken a very civilised and cultured flat far enough from Camden Town to be nearly Regents Park. She provided the necessary margin by giving French lessons now and then when gas bills were imminent, and spent all her spare time reading books on psychology.

She read her first book on psychology out of curiosity, because it seemed to her an interesting sort of thing; and she read all the rest to see if they were just as silly. By the time she had read thirty-seven books on the subject, she had evolved ideas of her own on psychology; at variance, of course, with all thirty-seven volumes read to date. In fact, the thirty-seven volumes seemed to her so idiotic and made her so angry that she sat down there and then and wrote reams of refutal. Since one cannot talk about psychology in anything but jargon, there being no English for most of it, the reams of refutal read very learnedly indeed. Not that that would have impressed anyone if Miss Pym had not used the back of a discarded sheet (her typing was not very professional) on which to write:

Dear Mr Stallard, I should be *so* grateful if you would not use your wireless after eleven at night. I find it so distracting. Yours sincerely Lucy Pym.

Mr Stallard, whom she did not know (his name was on the card outside his door on the floor below) arrived in person that evening. He was holding her letter open in his hand, which seemed to Lucy very grim indeed, and she swallowed several times before she could

make any coherent sound at all. But Mr Stallard wasn't angry about the wireless. He was a publishers' reader, it seemed, and was interested in what she had unconsciously sent him on the back of the paper.

Now in normal times a publisher would have rung for brandy at the mere suggestion of publishing a book on psychology. But the previous year the British public had shaken the publishing world by tiring suddenly of fiction, and developing an interest in abstruse subjects, such as the distance of Sirius from the earth, and the inward meaning of primitive dances in Bechuanaland. Publishers were falling over themselves, therefore, in their effort to supply this strange new thirst for knowledge, and Miss Pym found herself welcomed with open arms. That is to say, she was taken to lunch by the senior partner, and given an agreement to sign. This alone was a piece of luck, but Providence so ordained it that not only had the British public tired of fiction, but the intellectuals had tired of Freud and Company. They were longing for Some New Thing. And Lucy proved to be it. So Lucy woke one morning to find herself not only famous, but a best-seller. She was so shocked that she went out and had three cups of black coffee and sat in the Park looking straight in front of her for the rest of the morning.

She had been a best-seller for several months, and had become quite used to lecturing on "her subject" to learned societies, when Henrietta's letter had come; reminding her of their schooldays together and asking her to come and stay for a while and address the students. Lucy was a little wearied of addressing people, and the image of Henrietta had grown dim with the years. She was about to write a polite refusal, when she remembered the day on which the fourth form had discovered her christened name to be Laetitia; a shame that Lucy had spent her life concealing. The fourth form had excelled themselves, and Lucy had been wondering whether her mother would mind very much about her suicide, and deciding that anyhow she had brought it on herself by giving her daughter such a high-falutin name. And then Henrietta had waded into the humourists, literally and metaphorically. Her blistering comment had withered humour at the root, so that the word Laetitia had never been heard again, and Lucy had gone home and enjoyed jam roly-poly instead of throwing herself in the river. Lucy sat in her civilised and cultured living-room, and felt the old passionate gratitude to Henrietta run over her in waves. She wrote and said that she would be delighted to stay a night with Henrietta (her native caution was not entirely obliterated by her gratitude) and would with pleasure talk on psychology to her students.

The pleasure had been considerable, she thought, pushing up a hump of sheet to shut out the full brilliance of the daylight. Quite the nicest audience she had ever had. Rows of shining heads, making the bare lecture-room look like a garden. And good hearty applause. After weeks of the polite pattering of learned societies it was pleasant to hear the percussion of hollowed palm on hollowed palm. And their questions had been quite intelligent. Somehow, although psychology was a subject on their timetable, as shown in the common-room, she had not expected intellectual appreciation from young women who presumably spent their days doing things with their muscles. Only a few, of course, had asked questions; so there was still a chance that the rest were morons.

Oh well, tonight she would sleep in her own charming bed, and all this would seem like a dream. Henrietta had pressed her to stay for some days, and for a little she had toyed with the idea. But supper had shaken her. Beans and milk pudding seemed an uninspired sort of meal for a summer evening. Very sustaining and nourishing and all that, she didn't doubt. But not a meal one wanted to repeat. The staff table, Henrietta had said, always had the same food that the students had; and Lucy had hoped that that remark didn't mean that she had looked doubtfully upon the beans. She had tried to look very bright and pleased about the beans; but perhaps it hadn't been a success.

"Tommy! Tom-mee! Oh, Tommy, darling, waken up. I'm desperate!"

Miss Pym shot into wakefulness. The despairing cries seemed to be in her room. Then she realised that the second window of her room gave on to the courtyard; that the courtyard was small, and conversation from room to room through the gaping windows a natural method of communication. She lay trying to quiet her thumping heart, peering down over the folds of sheet to where, beyond the hump of her toes, the foreshortened oblong of the window framed a small piece of distant wall. But her bed lay in the angle of the room, one window to her right in the wall behind her, and the courtyard window to her left beyond the foot of her bed, and all that was visible from her pillow through the tall thin strip of brightness was half of an open window far down the courtyard.

"Tom-mee! Tom-mee!"

A dark head appeared in the window Miss Pym could see.

"For God's sake, someone," said the head, "throw something at Thomas and stop Dakers' row."

"Oh, Greengage, darling, you *are* an unsympathetic beast. I've bust my garter, and I don't know *what* to do. And Tommy took my *only* safety-pin yesterday to pick the winkles with at Tuppence-ha'penny's party. She simply *must* let me have it back before-*Tommy!* Oh *Tommy!*"

"Hey, shut up, will you," said a new voice, in a lowered tone, and there was a pause. A pause, Lucy felt, full of sign language.

"And what does all that semaphoring mean?" asked the dark head.

"Shut up, I tell you. *She's* there!" This in desperate *sotto voce*.

"Who is?"

"The Pym woman."

"What *rubbish*, darling,"-it was the Dakers voice again, high and unsubdued; the happy voice of a world's darling-"she's sleeping in the front of the house with the rest of the mighty. *Do* you think she would have a spare safety-pin if I was to ask her?"

"She looks zipp-fastener to me," a new voice said.

"Oh, will you be quiet! I tell you, she's in Bentley's room!"

There was a real silence this time. Lucy saw the dark head turn sharply towards her window.

"How do you know?" someone asked.

"Jolly told me last night when she was giving me late supper." Miss Joliffe was the housekeeper, Lucy remembered, and appreciated the nickname for so grim a piece of humanity.

"Gawd's truth!" said the «zipp-fastener» voice, with feeling.

Into the silence came a bell. The same urgent clamour that had wakened them. The dark head disappeared at the first sound of it, and Dakers' voice above the row could be heard wailing her desperation like a lost thing. Social gaffes were relegated to their proper unimportance, as the business of the day overwhelmed them. A great wave of sound rose up to meet the sound of the bell. Doors were

banged, feet drummed in the corridor, voices called, someone remembered that Thomas was still asleep, and a tattoo was beaten on her locked door when objects flung at her from surrounding windows had failed to waken her, and then there was the sound of running feet on the gravel path that crossed the courtyard grass. And gradually there were more feet on the gravel and fewer on the stairs, and the babble of voices swelled to a climax and faded. When the noises had grown faint with distance or died into lecture-room silence, a single pair of feet pattered in flight across the gravel, a voice saying: "Damn, damn, damn, damn," at each footfall. The Thomas who slept, apparently.

Miss Pym felt sympathetic to the unknown Thomas. Bed was a charming place at any time, but if one was so sleepy that neither riotous bell-ringing nor the wails of a colleague made any impression, then getting up must be torture. Welsh, too, probably. All Thomases were Welsh. Celts hated getting up. Poor Thomas. Poor, poor Thomas. She would like to find poor Thomas a job where she would never have to get up before afternoon.

Sleep ran over her in waves, drawing her deeper and deeper under. She wondered if "looking zipp-fastener" was a compliment. Being a safety-pin person couldn't be thought exactly admirable, so perhaps-

She fell asleep.

She was being beaten with knouts by two six-foot cossacks because she persisted in using the old-fashioned safety-pin when progress decreed a zipp-fastener, and the blood had begun to trickle down her back when she woke to the fact that the only thing that was being assaulted was her hearing. The bell was ringing again. She said something that was neither civilised nor cultured, and sat up. No, definitely, not a minute after lunch would she stay. There was a 2.41 from Larborough, and on that 2.41 she would be; her goodbyes said, her duty to friendship done, and her soul filled with the beatitude of escape. She would treat herself to a half-pound box of chocolates on the station platform as a sort of outward congratulation. It would show on the bathroom scales at the end of the week, but who cared?

The thought of the scales reminded her of the civilised and cultured necessity of having a bath. Henrietta had been sorry about its being so far to the staff bathrooms; she had been sorry altogether to put a guest into the student block, but Froken Gustavsen's mother from Sweden was occupying the only staff guest-room, and was going to stay for some weeks until she had seen and criticised the result of her daughter's work when the annual Demonstration would take place at the beginning of the month. Lucy doubted very much whether her bump of locality-a hollow according to her friends-was good enough to take her back to that bathroom. It would be awful to go prowling along those bright empty corridors, arriving perhaps at lecture-rooms unawares. And still more awful to ask in a crowded corridor of up-since-dawners where one could perform one's belated ablutions.

Lucy's mind always worked like that. It wasn't sufficient for it to visualise one horror; it must visualise the opposite one too. She sat so long considering the rival horrors, and enjoying the sensation of doing nothing, that still another bell rang and still another wave of drumming feet and calling voices rose up and swamped the quiet of the morning. Lucy looked at her watch. It was half-past seven.

She had just decided to be uncivilised and uncultured and "go in her mook" as her daily woman called it-after all, what was this immersion in water but a modern fad, and if Charles the Second could afford to smell a little high, who was she, a mere commoner, to girn at missing a bath? — when there was a knock on her door. Rescue was at hand. Oh, joy, oh, glory, her marooned condition was at an end.

"Come in," she called in the glad tones of a Crusoe welcoming a landing party. Of course Henrietta would come to say good-morning. How silly of her not to have thought of that. She was still at heart the little rabbit who didn't expect Henrietta to bother about her. Really, she must cultivate a habit of mind more suitable to a Celebrity. Perhaps if she were to do her hair differently, or say over something twenty times a day after the manner of Coue-"Come in!"

But it was not Henrietta. It was a goddess.

A goddess with golden hair, a bright blue linen tunic, sea-blue eyes, and the most enviable pair of legs. Lucy always noticed other women's legs, her own being a sad disappointment to her.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said the goddess. "I forgot that you might not be up. In college we keep such odd hours."

Lucy thought that it was nice of this heavenly being to take the blame for her sloth.

"I do apologise for interrupting your dressing." The blue eye came to rest on a mule which was lying in the middle of the floor, and stayed there as if fascinated. It was a pale blue satin mule; very feminine, very thriftless, very feathery. A most undeniable piece of nonsense.

"I'm afraid it is rather silly," Lucy said.

"If you only knew, Miss Pym, what it is to see an object that is not strictly utilitarian!" And then, as if recalled to her business by the very temptation of straying from it: "My name is Nash. I'm the Head Senior. And I came to say that the Senior students would be very honoured if you would come to tea with them tomorrow. On Sundays we take our tea out into the garden. It is a Senior privilege. And it really is very pleasant out there on a summer afternoon, and we really are looking forward to having you." She smiled with eager benevolence on Miss Pym.

Lucy explained that she would not be there tomorrow; that she was departing this afternoon.

"Oh, no!" protested the Nash girl; and the genuine feeling in her tone caused Lucy a rush of warmth to the heart. "No, Miss Pym, you mustn't! You really mustn't. You have no idea what a god-send you are to us. It's so seldom that anyone-anyone interesting comes to stay. This place is rather like a convent. We are all so hard-worked that we have no time to think of an outside world; and this is the last term for us Seniors, and everything is very grim and claustrophobic-Final Exams, and the Demonstration, and being found posts, and what not-and we are all feeling like death, and our last scrap of sense of proportion is gone. And then you come, a piece of the outside, a civilised being-" She paused; half laughing, half serious. "You can't desert us."

"But you have an outside lecturer *every* Friday," Lucy pointed out. It was the first time in her life she had been a god-send to anyone, and she was determined to take the assertion with a grain of salt. She didn't at all like the gratified feeling that was sniffing round the edge of her emotions.

Miss Nash explained with clarity, point, and no small bitterness that the last three lecturers had been: an octogenarian on Assyrian inscriptions, a Czech on Central Europe, and a bonesetter on scoliosis.

"What is scoliosis?" asked Lucy.

"Curvature of the spine. And if you think that any of them brought sweetness and light into the College atmosphere, you are wrong. These lectures are supposed to keep us in touch with the world, but if I must be both frank and indiscreet"-she was obviously enjoying being both-"the frock you wore last night did us more good than all the lectures we have ever heard."

Lucy had spent a really shocking sum on that garment when first her book became a best-seller, and it still remained her favourite; she had worn it to impress Henrietta. The gratified feeling came a little nearer.

But not near enough to destroy her common sense. She could still remember the beans. And the lack of bedside lamps. And the

lack of any bells to summon service. And the everlasting bells that rang to summon others. No, on the 2.41 from Larborough she would be, though every student of the Leys Physical Training College lay down in her path and wept aloud. She murmured something about engagements-leaving it to be inferred that her diary bulged with pressing and desirable appointments-and suggested that Miss Nash might, meanwhile, direct her to the Staff bathrooms. "I didn't want to go prowling through the corridors, and I couldn't find a bell to ring."

Miss Nash, having sympathised with her about the lack of service-"Eliza really should have remembered that there are no bells in the rooms here and come to call you; she's the Staff house-maid"-suggested that, if Miss Pym didn't mind using the students' baths, they were much nearer. "They are cubicles, of course; I mean, they have walls only part of the way; and the floor is a sort of greenish concrete where the Staff have turquoise mosaic with a tasteful design in dolphins, but the water is the same."

Miss Pym was delighted to use the students' bathroom, and as she gathered her bathing things together the unoccupied half of her mind was busy with Miss Nash's lack of any studentlike reverence for the Staff. It reminded her of something. And presently she remembered what it reminded her of. Mary Barharrow. The rest of Mary Barharrow's form had been meek and admiring young labourers in the field of irregular French verbs, but Mary Barharrow, though diligent and amiable, had treated her French mistress as an equal; and that was because Mary Barharrow's father was "nearly a millionaire." Miss Pym concluded that in the "outside"-strange how one already used Klondyke terms about College-Miss Nash, who had so markedly Mary Barharrow's charming air of social ease and equality, had also a father very like Mary Barharrow's. She was to learn later that it was the first thing that anyone remarked on when Nash's name was mentioned. "Pamela Nash's people are very rich, you know. They have a butler." They never failed to mention the butler. To the daughters of struggling doctors, lawyers, dentists, business men and farmers, he was as exotic as a negro slave.

"Shouldn't you be at some class or other?" asked Miss Pym, as the quietness of the sunlit corridors proclaimed an absorption elsewhere. "I take it that if you are wakened at half-past five you work before breakfast."

"Oh, yes. In the summer we have two periods before breakfast, one active and one passive. Tennis practice and kinesiology, or something like that."

"What is kin-whatever-it-is?"

"Kinesiology?" Miss Nash considered for a moment the best way of imparting knowledge to the ignorant, and then spoke in imaginary quotation. "I take down a jug with a handle from a high shelf; describe the muscle-work involved." And as Miss Pym's nod showed that she had understood: "But in winter we get up like anyone else at half-past seven. As for this particular period, it is normally used for taking outside certificates-Public Health, and Red Cross, and what not. But since we have finished with these we are allowed to use it as a prep. hour for our final exams, which begin next week. We have very little prep. time so we are glad of it."

"Aren't you free after tea, or thereabouts?"

Miss Nash looked amused. "Oh, no. There is afternoon clinic from four o'clock till six; outside patients, you know. Everything from flat feet to broken thighs. And from half-past six to eight there is dancing. Ballet, not folk. We have folk in the morning; it ranks as exercise not art. And supper doesn't finish much before half-past eight, so we are very sleepy before we begin our prep. and it is usually a fight between our sleepiness and our ignorance."

As they turned into the long corridor leading to the stairs, they overtook a small scuttling figure clutching under one arm the head and thorax of a skeleton and the pelvis and legs under the other arm.

"What are you doing with George, Morris?" asked Miss Nash as they drew level.

"Oh, *please* don't stop me, Beau," panted the startled Junior, hitching her grotesque burden more firmly on to her right hip and continuing to scuttle in front of them, "and *please* forget that you saw me. I mean that you saw George. I meant to waken early and put him back in the lecture-room before the half-past five bell went, but I just slept."

"Have you been up all night with George?"

"No, only till about two. I-"

"And how did you manage about lights?"

"I pinned my travelling rug over the window, of course," said the Junior, in the testy tones of one explaining the obvious.

"A nice atmosphere on a June evening!"

"It was hellish," said Miss Morris, simply. "But it really *is* the only way I can swot up my insertions, so *please*, Beau, just forget that you saw me. I'll get him back before the Staff come down to breakfast."

"You'll never do it, you know. You're bound to meet someone or other."

"Oh, please don't discourage me. I'm terrified enough now. And I really don't know if I can remember how to hook up his middle." She preceded them down the stairs, and disappeared into the front of the house.

"Positively Through-the-Looking-Glass," commented Miss Pym, watching her go. "I always thought insertion was something to do with needlework."

"Insertions? They're the exact place on a bone where a muscle is attached to it. It's much easier to do it with the skeleton in front of you, than with just a book. That is why Morris abducted George." She expelled a breath of indulgent laughter. "Very enterprising of her. I stole odd bones from the drawers in the lecture-room when I was a Junior, but I never thought of taking George. It's the dreadful cloud that hangs over a Junior's life, you know. Final Anatomy. It really is a Final. You're supposed to know all about the body before you begin practising on it, so Final Anatomy is a Junior exam, not a Senior one like the other finals. The bathrooms are along here. When I was a Junior the long grass at the edge of the cricket field was simply stiff on Sundays with hidden Juniors hugging their Gray. It is strictly forbidden to take books out of College, and on Sundays we are supposed to go all social and go out to tea, or to church, or to the country. But no Junior in the summer term ever did anything on a Sunday except find a quiet spot for herself and Gray. It was quite a business getting Gray out of College. Do you know Gray? About the size of those old family Bibles that rested on the parlour table. There was actually a rumour once that half the girls at Leys were pregnant, but it turned out that it was only the odd silhouette that everyone made with Gray stuffed up the front of their Sunday bests."

Miss Nash stooped to the taps and sent a roar of water rushing into the bath. "When everyone in College bathes three or four times a day, in the matter of minutes, you have to have a Niagara of a tap," she explained above the row. "I'm afraid you are going to be very

late for breakfast." And as Miss Pym looked dismayed and oddly small-girlish at the prospect: "Let me bring up something for you on a tray. No, it won't be any trouble, I'd love to do it. There isn't any need for a guest to appear at eight o'clock breakfast, anyhow. You'd much better have it in peace in your room." She paused with her hand on the door. "And do change your mind about staying. It really would give us pleasure. More pleasure than you can imagine."

She smiled and was gone.

Lucy lay in the warm soft water and thought happily of her breakfast. How pleasant not to have to make conversation among all those chattering voices. How imaginative and kind of that charming girl to carry a tray to her. Perhaps after all it would be nice to spend a day or two among these young-

She nearly leaped from her bath as a bell began its maniacal yelling not a dozen yards from where she lay. That settled it. She sat up and soaped herself. Not a minute later than the 2.41 from Larborough, not one minute later.

As the bell-presumably a five-minute warning before the gong at eight o'clock-died into silence, there was a wild rush in the corridor, the two doors to her left were flung open, and as the water cascaded into the baths a high familiar voice was heard shrieking: "Oh, darling, I'm going to be so late for breakfast, but I'm in a *muck sweat*, my dear. I know I should have sat down quietly and done the composition of plasma, of which I know *absolutely noth*-ing, my dear, and Final Phys. is on Tuesday. But it is such a lovely morning-Now what *have* I done with my *soap*?"

Lucy's jaw slowly dropped as it was borne in upon her that in a community which began the day at half-past five and ended it at eight in the evening, there were still individuals who had the vitality to work themselves into a muck sweat when they need not.

"Oh, Donnie, *darling*, I've left my soap behind. Do throw me over yours!"

"You'll have to wait till I've soaped myself," said a placid voice that was in marked contrast to Dakers' high emphasis.

"Well, my angel, *do* be *quick*. I've been late twice this week, and Miss Hodge looked distinctly *odd* the last time. I say, Donnie, you *couldn't* by any chance take my 'adipose' patient at twelve o'clock clinic, could you?"

"No, I couldn't."

"She really isn't so heavy as she looks, you know. You have only to-"

"I have a patient of my own."

"Yes, but only the little boy with the ankle. Lucas could take him along with her 'tortis colli' girl-"

"No."

"No, I was afraid you wouldn't. Oh, dear, I don't know *when* I'm going to do that plasma. As for the coats of the stomach, they simply *baffle* me, my dear. I don't really believe there are four, anyhow. It's just a conspiracy. Miss Lux says look at tripe, but I don't see that tripe proves anything."

"Soap coming up."

"Oh, *thank* you, darling. You've saved my life. What a nice *smell*, my dear. *Very* expensive." In the momentary silence of soaping she became aware that the bath on her right was occupied.

"Who is next door, Donnie?"

"Don't know. Gage, probably."

"Is that you, Greengage?"

"No," said Lucy, startled, "it's Miss Pym." And hoped it wasn't as prim as it sounded.

"No, but really, who is it?"

"Miss Pym."

"It's a very good imitation, whoever you are."

"It's Littlejohn," suggested the placid voice. "She does imitations."

Miss Pym fell back on a defeated silence.

There was the hurr-oosh of a body lifted suddenly from the water, the spat of a wet foot placed firmly on the edge of the bath, eight wet finger-tips appeared on the edge of the partition, and a face peered over it. It was a long pale face, like an amiable pony's, with the straight fair hair above it screwed up into a knob with a hasty hairpin. An oddly endearing face. Even in that crowded moment, Lucy understood suddenly how Dakers had managed to reach her final term at Leys without being knocked on the head by exasperated colleagues.

First horror, then a wild flush together with a dawning amusement, invaded the face above the partition. It disappeared abruptly. A despairing wail rose from beyond.

"Oh, Miss Pym! Oh, dear Miss Pym! I do apologise. I abase myself. It didn't occur to me even to think it might be you-"

Lucy could not help feeling that she was enjoying her own enormity.

"I hope you're not offended. Not terribly, I mean. We are so used to people's skins that-that-"

Lucy understood that she was trying to say that the gaffe was less important in these surroundings than it would have been elsewhere, and since she herself had been decently soaping a big toe at the operative moment, she had no feelings on the subject. She said kindly that it was entirely her own fault for occupying a student's bathroom, and that Miss Dakers was not to worry about it for a moment.

"You know my name?"

"Yes. You woke me in the dawn this morning yelling for a safety-pin."

"Oh, *catastrophe*! Now I shall *never* be able to look you in the face!"

"I expect Miss Pym is taking the first train back to London," said the voice in the further bath, in a now-look-what-you've-done tone.

"That is O'Donnell next door," said Dakers. "She's from Ireland."

"Ulster," said O'Donnell, without heat.

"How d'you do, Miss O'Donnell."

"You must think this is a mad-house, Miss Pym. But don't judge us by Dakers, please. Some of us are quite grown up. And some of

us are even civilised. When you come to tea tomorrow you will see."

Before Miss Pym could say that she was not coming to tea, a low murmur began to invade the cubicles, rising rapidly into the deep roar of a gong. Into the tumult Dakers' banshee wail rose like the voice of a sea-gull in a storm. She was going to be so late. And she was so grateful for the soap, which had saved her life. And where was the girdle of her tunic? And if dear Miss Pym would promise to overlook her failings up to date, she would yet show her that she was a sensible female and a civilised adult. And they were *all* looking forward so much to that tea tomorrow.

With a rush and a bang the students fled, leaving Miss Pym alone with the dying pulse of the gong and the throaty protest of bath water running away.

At 2.41, when the afternoon fast train to London was pulling out of Larborough prompt to the minute, Miss Pym sat under the cedar on the lawn wondering whether she was a fool, and not much caring anyhow. It was very pleasant there in the sunlit garden. It was also very quiet, since Saturday afternoon was, it appeared, match afternoon, and College *en masse* was down at the cricket field playing Coombe, a rival establishment from the other side of the County. If they had nothing else, these young creatures, they had versatility. It was a far cry from the lining of the stomach to the placing of a cricket field, but they seemingly took it in their stride. Henrietta, coming into her bedroom after breakfast, had said that if she stayed over the week-end she would at least find it a new experience. "They are a very varied and lively crowd, and the work is very interesting." And Henrietta had certainly been right. There was no moment when some new facet of this odd existence was not being presented to her. She had sat through luncheon at the Staff table, eating unidentifiable dishes that were «balanced» to a dietetic marvel, and making the closer acquaintance of the Staff. Henrietta sat in lonely state at the top of the table and gobbled her food in an abstracted silence. But Miss Lux was talkative. Miss Lux-angular, plain, and clever- was Mistress of Theory, and as befitted a lecturer on theory had not only ideas but opinions. Miss Wragg, on the other hand, the Junior Gymnast-big, bouncing, young, and pink-had apparently no ideas at all and her only opinions were reflections of Madame Lefevre's. Madame Lefevre, the ballet mistress, spoke seldom, but when she did it was in a voice like dark brown velvet and no one interrupted her. At the bottom of the table, with her mother by her side, sat Froken Gustavsen, the Senior Gymnast, who talked not at all.

It was to Froken Gustavsen that Lucy found her eyes going during that lunch. There was a sly amusement in the handsome Swede's clear pale eyes that Lucy found irresistible. The heavy Miss Hodge, the clever Miss Lux, the dumb Miss Wragg, the elegant Madame Lefevre-what did they all look like through the eyes of a tall pale enigma from Sweden?

Now, having spent lunch wondering about a Swede, she was waiting the advent of a South American. "Desterro doesn't play games," Henrietta had said, "so I'll send her to keep you company this afternoon." Lucy had not wanted anyone to keep her companyshe was used to her own company and liked it-but the thought of a South American at an English college of physical training teased her. And when Nash, running into her after lunch, had said: "I'm afraid you're going to be deserted this afternoon, if you don't care for cricket," another Senior passing in the crush had said: "It's all right, Beau, The Nut Tart is going to look after her." "Oh, good," Beau had said, apparently so accustomed to the nickname that it had ceased to have either meaning or oddity for her.

But Lucy looked forward to meeting a Nut Tart, and sitting in the sunlit garden digesting the dietetic marvels she pondered the name. «Nut» was Brazil, perhaps. It was also the modern slang for «dippy» or "daft," she believed. But «tart»? Surely not!

A Junior, running past her on the way to the bicycle shed, flashed her a smile, and she remembered that they had met in the corridor that morning. "Did you get George back safely?" she called after her.

"Yes, thank you," beamed little Miss Morris, pausing to dance on one toe, "but I think I'm in a different sort of trouble now. You see, I had my arm round George's waist, sort of steadying him after hanging him up, when Miss Lux came in. I'll never be able to explain away that, I'm afraid."

"Life is difficult," agreed Lucy.

"However, I think I really do know my insertions now," called little Miss Morris, speeding away over the grass.

Nice children, thought Miss Pym. Nice, clean, healthy children. It was really very pleasant here. That smudge on the horizon was the smoke of Larborough. There would be another smudge like that over London. It was much better to sit here where the air was bright with sun and heavy with roses, and be given friendly smiles by friendly young creatures. She pushed her plump little feet a little further away from her, approved the Georgian bulk of the "old house" that glowed in the sunlight across the lawn, regretted the modern brick wings that made a "Mary Ann" back to it, but supposed that as modern blocks go the Leys ensemble was pleasant enough. Charmingly proportioned lecture-rooms in the "old house," and neat modern little bedrooms in the wings. An ideal arrangement. And the ugly bulk of the gymnasium decently hidden behind all. Before she went away on Monday she must see the Seniors go through their gym. There would be a double pleasure in that for her. The pleasure of watching experts trained to the last fine hair of perfection, and the ineffable pleasure of knowing that never, never as long as she lived, would she herself have to climb a rib-stall again.

Round the corner of the house, as she gazed, came a figure in a flowered silk dress and a plain, wide-brimmed shady hat. It was a slim, graceful figure; and watching it come Lucy realised that she had unconsciously pictured the South American plump and overripe. She also realised where the «tart» came from, and smiled. The outdoor frocks of the austere young students of Leys would not be flowered; neither would they be cut so revealingly; and never, oh never, would their hats be broad-brimmed and shady.

"Good afternoon, Miss Pym. I am Teresa Desterro. I am so sorry that I missed your lecture last night. I had a class in Larborough." Desterro took off her hat with a leisurely and studied grace, and dropped to the grass by Lucy's side in one continuous smooth movement. Everything about her was smooth and fluid: her voice, her drawling speech, her body, her movements, her dark hair, her honey-brown eyes.

"A class?"

"A dancing class; for shop girls. So earnest; so precise; so very bad. They will give me a box of chocolates next week because it is the last class of the season, and because they like me, and because it is after all the custom; and I shall feel like a crook. It is false pretences. No one could teach them to dance."

"I expect they enjoy themselves. Is it usual? I mean, for students to take outside classes?"

"But we all do, of course. That is how we get practice. At schools, and convents, and clubs, and that sort of thing. You do not care for cricket?"

Lucy, rousing herself to this swift change of subject, explained that cricket was only possible to her in the company of a bag of

cherries. "How is it that you don't play?"

"I don't play *any* games. To run about after a little ball is supremely ridiculous. I came here for the dancing. It is a very good dancing college."

But surely, Lucy said, there were ballet schools in London of an infinitely higher standard than anything obtainable at a college of physical training.

"Oh, for that one has to begin young, and to have a metier. Me, I have no metier, only a liking."

"And will you teach, then, when you go back to-Brazil, is it?"

"Oh, no; I shall get married," said Miss Desterro simply. "I came to England because I had an unhappy love affair. He was r-rravishing, but qu-ite unsuitable. So I came to England to get over it."

"Is your mother English, perhaps?"

"No, my mother is French. My grandmother is English. I adore the English. Up to here"-she lifted a graceful hand, wrist properly leading, and laid it edge-wise across her neck-"they are full of romance, and from there up, plain horse sense. I went to my grandmother, and I cried all over her best silk chairs, and I said "What shall I do? What shall I do?" About my lover, you understand. And she said: "You can blow your nose and get out of the country." So I said I would go to Paris and live in a garret and paint pictures of an eye and a seashell sitting on a plate. But she said: "You will not. You will go to England and sweat a bit." So, as I always listen to my grandmother, and since I like dancing and am very good at it, I came here. To Leys. They looked a little sideways on me at first when I said I wanted just to dance-"

This is what Lucy had been wondering. How did this charming «nut» find a welcome in this earnest English college, this starting-place of careers?

"— but one of the students had broken down in the middle of her training-they often do, and do you wonder? — and that left a vacant place in the scheme, which was not so nice, so they said: 'Oh, well, let this crazy woman from Brazil have Kenyon's room and allow her to come to the classes. It will not do any harm and it will keep the books straight."

"So you began as a Senior?"

"For dancing, yes. I was already a dancer, you understand. But I took Anatomy with the Juniors. I find bones interesting. And to other lectures I went as I pleased. I have listened to all subjects. All but plumbing. I find plumbing indecent."

Miss Pym took «plumbing» to be Hygiene. "And have you enjoyed it all?"

"It has been a li-beral education. They are very naive, the English girls. They are like little boys of nine." Noticing the unbelieving smile on Miss Pym's face: there was nothing naive about Beau Nash. "Or little girls of eleven. They have 'raves. You know what a 'rave' is?" Miss Pym nodded. "They swoon if Madame Lefevre says a kind word to them. I swoon, too, but it is from surprise. They save up their money to buy flowers for Froken, who thinks of nothing but a Naval Officer in Sweden."

"How do you know that?" asked Lucy, surprised.

"He is on her table. In her room. His photograph, I mean. And she is Continental. She does not have 'raves."

"The Germans do," Lucy pointed out. "They are famous for it."

"An ill-balanced people," said Desterro, dismissing the Teutonic race. "The Swedes are not like that."

"All the same, I expect she likes the little offerings of flowers."

"She does not, of course, throw them out of the window. But I notice she likes better the ones who do not bring her offerings."

"Oh? There are some who do not have 'raves, then?"

"Oh, yes. A few. The Scots, for instance. We have two." She might have been talking of rabbits. "They are too busy quarrelling to have any spare emotions."

"Quarrelling? But I thought the Scots stuck together the world over."

"Not if they belong to different winds."

"Winds?"

"It is a matter of climate. We see it very much in Brazil. A wind that goes 'a-a-a-ah'" [she opened her red mouth and expelled a soft insinuating breath] "makes one kind of person. But a wind that goes 's-s-s-s-s" [she shot the breath viciously out through her teeth] "makes another person altogether. In Brazil it is altitude, in Scotland it is West Coast and East Coast. I observed it in the Easter holidays, and so understood about the Scots. Campbell has a wind that goes 'a-a-a-ah, and so she is lazy, and tells lies, and has much charm that is all of it quite synthetic. Stewart has a wind that goes 's-s-s-ss, so she is honest, and hardworking, and has a formidable conscience."

Miss Pym laughed. "According to you, the east coast of Scotland must be populated entirely by saints."

"There is also some personal reason for the quarrel, I understand. Something about abused hospitality."

"You mean that one went home with the other for holidays and- misbehaved?" Visions of vamped lovers, stolen spoons, and cigarette burns on the furniture, ran through Lucy's too vivid imagination.

"Oh, no. It happened more than two hundred years ago. In the deep snow, and there was a massacre." Desterro did full justice to the word "massacre."

At this Lucy really laughed. To think that the Campbells were still engaged in living down Glencoe! A narrow-minded race, the Celts.

She sat so long considering the Celts that The Nut Tart turned to look up at her. "Have you come to use us as specimens, Miss Pym?"

Lucy explained that she and Miss Hodge were old friends and that her visit was a holiday one. "In any case," she said, kindly, "I doubt whether as a specimen a Physical Training Student is likely to be psychologically interesting."

"No? Whv?"

"Oh, too normal and too nice. Too much of a type."

A faint amusement crossed Desterro's face; the first expression it had shown so far. Unexpectedly, this stung Lucy; as if she too had been found guilty of being naive.

"You don't agree?"

"I am trying to think of someone-some Senior-who is normal. It is not easy."

"Oh. come!"

"You know how they live here. How they work. It would be difficult to go through their years of training here and be quite normal in their last term."

"Do you suggest that Miss Nash is not normal?"

"Oh, Beau. She is a strong-minded creature, and so has suffered less, perhaps. But would you call her friendship for Innes quite normal? *Nice*, of course," Desterro added hastily, "quite irreproachable. But normal, no. That David and Jonathan relationship. It is a very happy one, no doubt, but it"-Desterro waved her arm to summon an appropriate word — "it *excludes* so much. The Disciples are the same, only there are four of them."

"The Disciples?"

"Mathews, Waymark, Lucus, and Littlejohn. They have come up the College together because of their names. And now, believe me, my dear Miss Pym, they think together. They have the four rooms in the roof"-she tilted her head to the four dormer windows in the roof of the wing-"and if you ask any one of them to lend you a pin she says: "We have not got one."

"Well, there is Miss Dakers. What would you say was wrong with Miss Dakers?"

"Arrested development," said Miss Desterro dryly.

"Nonsense!" said Lucy, determined to assert herself. "A happy, simple, uncomplicated human being, enjoying herself and the world. *Quite* normal."

The Nut Tart smiled suddenly, and her smile was frank and unstudied. "Very well, Miss Pym, I give you Dakers. But I remind you that it is their last term, this. And so everything is e-norrrmously exaggerated. Everyone is just the least little bit insane. No, it is true, I promise you. If a student is frightened by nature, then she is a thousand times more frightened this term. If she is ambitious, then her ambition becomes a passion. *And* so on." She sat up to deliver herself of her summing-up. "It is not a normal life they lead. You cannot expect them to be normal."

"You cannot expect them to be normal," repeated Miss Pym to herself, sitting in the same place on Sunday afternoon and looking at the crowd of happy and excessively normal young faces clustered below her on the grass. Her eye ran over them with pleasure. If none of them was distinguished, at least none of them was mean. Nor was there any trace of morbidity, nor even of exhaustion, in their sunburnt alertness. These were the survivors of a gruelling course-that was admitted even by Henrietta-and it seemed to Miss Pym that the rigours might perhaps have been justified if the residue were of such excellence.

She was amused to note that the Disciples, by much living together, had begun to look vaguely alike-as husband and wife often do, however different their features. They all seemed to have the same round face with the same expression of pleased expectancy; it was only later that one noticed differences of build and colouring.

She was also amused to observe that the Thomas who slept was most undeniably Welsh; a small, dark aborigine. And that O'Donnell, who had now materialised from a voice in the bath, was equally unmistakably an Irishwoman; the long lashes, the fine skin, the wide grey eyes. The two Scots-separated by the furthest possible distance that still allowed them to be part of the group-were less obvious. Stewart was the red-haired girl cutting up cake from one of the plates that lay about on the grass. ("It's from Crowford's," she was saying, in a pleasant Edinburgh voice, "so you poor creatures who know nothing but Buzzards will have a treat for a change!") Campbell, propped against the bole of the cedar, and consuming bread-and-butter with slow absorption, had pink cheeks and brown hair and a vague prettiness.

Apart from Hasselt, who was the girl with the flat, calm, early-Primitive face and who was South African, the rest of the Seniors were, as Queen Elizabeth said, "mere English."

The only face that approached distinction, as opposed to good looks, was that of Mary Innes, Beau Nash's Jonathan. This pleased Miss Pym in an odd fashion. It was fitting, she felt, that Beau should have chosen for friend someone who had quality as well as looks. Not that Innes was particularly good-looking. Her eyebrows, low over her eyes, gave her face an intensity, a brooding expression, that robbed her fine bones of the beauty they might have had. Unlike Beau, who was animated and smiled easily, she was quiet and so far Miss Pym had not seen her smile, although they had had what amounted in the milieu to a lengthy conversation. That was last night, when Miss Pym was undressing after having spent the evening in the company of the Staff. There had come a knock on her door, and Beau had said: "I just came to see if you had everything you want. And to introduce you to your next-door neighbour, Mary Innes. Any time you want to be rescued, Innes will see to it." And Beau had said good-night and gone away, leaving Innes to finish the interview. Lucy had found her attractive and very intelligent, but just a shade disconcerting. She did not bother to smile if she was not amused, and though friendly and at her ease made no effort to be entertaining. In the academic and literary circles that Lucy had recently frequented this would not have been remarkable, but in the gay over-accented college world it had the effect almost of a rebuff. Almost. There was certainly nothing of rebuff in Innes's interest in her book-the Book-and in herself.

Looking at her now, sitting in the cedar shade, Lucy wondered if it were just that Mary Innes did not find life very amusing. Lucy had long prided herself on her analysis of facial characteristics, and was beginning nowadays to bet rather heavily on them. She had never, for instance, come across eyebrows beginning low over the nose and ending high up at the outer end without finding that their owner had a scheming, conniving mind. And someone-Jan Gordon, was it? — had observed that of the crowd round a park orator it was the long-nosed people who stayed to listen and the short-nosed people who walked away. So now, looking at Mary Innes's level eyebrows and firm mouth, she wondered whether the concentration of purpose they showed had forbidden any compensating laughter. It was in some way not a contemporary face at all. It was-was what?

An illustration from a history book? A portrait in a gallery?

Not, anyhow, the face of a games mistress at a girls' school. Definitely not. It was round faces like Mary Innes's that history was built

Of all the faces turning to her so constantly and turning away with chatter and badinage, only two were not immediately likeable. One was Campbell's; too pliant, too soft-mouthed, too ready to be all things to all men. The other belonged to a girl called Rouse; and was freckled, and tight-lipped, and watchful.

Rouse had come late to the tea-party, and her advent had caused an odd momentary silence. Lucy was reminded of the sudden stillness that falls on chattering birds when a hawk hovers. But there was nothing deliberate about the silence; no malice. It was as if they had paused in their talk to note her arrival, but had none of them cared sufficiently to welcome her into their own particular group.

"I'm afraid I'm late," she had said. And in the momentary quiet Lucy had caught the monosyllabic comment: "Swot!", and had concluded that Miss Rouse had not been able to drag herself away from her text-books. Nash had introduced her, and she had dropped to the grass with the rest, and the interrupted conversations flowed on. Lucy, always sympathetic to the odd-man-out, had caught herself being sorry for the latecomer; but a further inspection of Miss Rouse's North-Country features had convinced her that she was wasting good emotion. If Campbell, pink and pretty, was too pliant to be likeable, then Rouse was her complement. Nothing but a bull-dozer, Lucy felt, would make an impression on Miss Rouse.

"Miss Pym, you haven't had any of *my* cake," said Dakers, who, quite unabashed, had appropriated Lucy as an old acquaintance, and was now sitting propped against her chair, her legs straight out in front of her like a doll's.

"Which is yours?" asked Lucy, eyeing the various tuck-box products, which stood out from the college bread-and-butter and «Sunday» buns like Creed suits at a country fair.

Dakers' contribution, it seemed, was the chocolate sandwich with the butter icing. Lucy decided that for friendship's sake (and a little for greed) she would forget her weight this once.

"Do you always bring your own cakes to Sunday tea?"

"Oh, no, this is in *your* honour."

Nash, sitting on her other side, laughed. "What you see before you, Miss Pym, is a collection of skeletons out of cupboards. There is no physical training student who is not a Secret Eater."

"There has been no moment in my *whole* college career, my dears, when I wasn't *sick* with hunger. Only *shame* makes me stop eating at breakfast, and half an hour afterwards I'm hungry enough to eat the horse in the gym."

"That is why our only crime is-" Rouse was beginning, when Stewart kicked her so hard in the back that she almost fell forward.

"We have spread our dreams under your feet," mocked Nash, covering Rouse's broken sentence. "And a fine rich carpet of carbohydrate they are, to be sure."

"We also had a *solemn* conclave as to whether we ought to *dress* for you," said Dakers, cutting up chocolate sandwich for the others and unaware that there had been any gaffe in the offing. "But we decided that you didn't look very particular." As this raised a laugh, she added hastily, "In the very *nicest* sense, I mean. We thought you would like us as we are."

They were wearing all sorts of garments; as the taste of the wearer or the need of the moment dictated. Some were in shorts, some in blue linen games tunics, some in washing-silk dresses of suitably pastel shades. There were no flowered silks; Desterro was taking tea with the nuns of a convent in Larborough.

"Besides," said Gage, who looked like a Dutch doll and who was the dark head that appeared at a courtyard window at five-thirty yesterday morning and prayed someone to throw something at Thomas and so put a period to the wails of Dakers, "besides, much as we would like to do you honour, Miss Pym, every moment counts with our finals so oppressively near. Even a quick-change artist like a P.T. Senior needs five full minutes to achieve Sunday-bests, and by accepting us in our rags you have contributed"-she paused to count the gathering and do some mental arithmetic-"you have contributed one hour and twenty minutes to the sum of human knowledge."

"You can subtract my five minutes from that, my dear," said Dakers, licking a protuberant piece of butter-icing into safety with an expert tongue. "I've spent the whole afternoon doing the cortex of the brain, and the only result is a firm conviction that I personally haven't got a cortex."

"You must have a cortex," said Campbell, the literal-minded Scot, in a Glasgow drawl like syrup sliding from a spoon. But no one took any notice of this contribution to the obvious.

"Personally," said O'Donnell, "I think the vilest part of physiology are the villi. Imagine drawing cross-sections of something that has seven different parts and is less than a twentieth of an inch high!"

"But do you have to know the human structure in such detail?" asked Lucy.

"On Tuesday morning we do," said the Thomas who slept. "After that we can forget it for the rest of our lives."

Lucy, remembering the Monday morning visit to the gymnasium which she had promised herself, wondered if physical work ceased during Final Examinations week. Oh, no, they assured her. Not with the Dem. only a fortnight ahead. The Demonstration, she was given to understand, ranked only a short head behind Final Examinations as a hazard.

"All our parents come," said one of the Disciples, "and-"

"The parents of all of us, she means," put in a fellow Disciple.

"— and people from rival colleges, and all the-"

"All the civic swells of Larborough," put in a third. It seemed that when one Disciple burst into speech the others followed automatically.

"And all the County big-wigs," finished the fourth.

"It's murder," said the first, summing it up for them.

"I like the Dem.," said Rouse. And again that odd silence fell.

Not inimical. Merely detached. Their eyes went to her, and came away again, expressionlessly. No one commented on what she had said. Their indifference left her marooned in the moment.

"I think it's fun to show people what we can do," she added, a hint of defence in her tone.

They let that pass too. Never before had Lucy met that negative English silence in its full perfection; in its full cruelty. Her own edges began to curl up in sympathy.

But Rouse was less easily shrivelled. She was eyeing the plates before her, and putting out her hand for something to eat. "Is there any tea left in the pot?" she asked.

Nash bent forward to the big brown pot, and Stewart took up the talk from where the Disciples had left it.

"What really is murder is waiting to see what you pull out of the Post lottery."

"Post?" said Lucy. "You mean jobs? But why a lottery? You know what you apply for, surely?"

"Very few of us need to apply," Nash explained, pouring very black tea. "There are usually enough applications from schools to go round. Places that have had Leys gymnasts before just write to Miss Hodge when they have a vacancy and ask her to recommend someone. If it happens to be a very senior or responsible post, she may offer it to some Old Student who wants a change. But normally the vacancies are filled from Leaving Students."

"And a very fine bargain they get," said a Disciple.

"No one works so hard as a First-Poster does," said a second.

"For less money," supplemented a third.

"Or with a better grace," said a fourth.

"So you see," Stewart said, "the most agonising moment of the whole term is when you are summoned to Miss Hodge's room and told what your fate is going to be."

"Or when your train is pulling out of Larborough and you haven't been summoned at all!" suggested Thomas, who evidently had visions of being engulfed, jobless, by her native mountains again.

Nash sat back on her heels and smiled at Lucy. "It is not nearly as grim as it sounds. Quite a few of us are provided for already and so are not in the competition at all. Hasselt, for instance, is going back to South Africa to work there. And the Disciples *en masse* have

chosen medical work."

"We are going to start a clinic in Manchester," explained one.

"A very rheumaticky place."

"Full of deformities."

"And brass"-supplemented the other three automatically.

Nash smiled benevolently on them. "And I am going back to my old school as Games Coach. And the Nut-and Desterro, of course, doesn't want a post. So there aren't so many of us to find places for."

"I won't even be qualified if I don't go back to the liver pretty soon," Thomas said, her beady brown eyes blinking in the sun. "What a way to spend a summer evening."

They shifted their positions lazily, as if in protest, and fell to chatter again. But the reminder pricked them, and one by one they began to gather up their belongings and depart, trailing slowly across the sunlit grass like disconsolate children. Until presently Lucy found herself alone with the smell of the roses, and the murmur of insects, and the hot shimmer of the sunlit garden.

For half an hour she sat, in great beatitude, watching the slow shadow of the tree creep out from her feet. Then Desterro came back from Larborough; strolling slowly up the drive with a Rue de la Paix elegance that was odd after Lucy's hour of tumbled youth at tea. She saw Miss Pym, and changed her direction.

"Well," she said, "did you have a profitable afternoon?"

"I wasn't looking for profit," said Lucy, faintly tart. "It was one of the happiest afternoons I have ever spent."

The Nut Tart stood contemplating her.

"I think you are a *very* nice person," she said irrelevantly, and moved away, leisurely, to the house.

And Lucy suddenly felt very young, and didn't like the feeling at all. How dared a chit in a flowered frock make her feel inexperienced and foolish!

She rose abruptly and went to find Henrietta and be reminded that she was Lucy Pym, who had written The Book, and lectured to learned societies, and had her name in *Who's Who*, and was a recognised authority on the working of the Human Mind.

"What is the college crime?" she asked Henrietta, as they went upstairs after supper. They had paused by the big fan-lighted window on the landing to look down on the little quadrangle, letting the others precede them up to the drawing-room.

"Using the gymnasium as a short cut to the field-path," Henrietta said promptly.

"No, I mean real crime."

Henrietta turned to look at her sharply. After a moment she said: "My dear Lucy, when a human being works as hard as these girls do, it has neither the spare interest to devise a crime nor the energy to undertake it. What made you think of that subject?"

"Something someone said at tea this afternoon. About their 'only crime. It was something to do with being perpetually hungry."

"Oh, that!" Henrietta's brow cleared. "Food pilfering. Yes, we do now and then have that. In any community of this size there is always someone whose power of resisting temptation is small."

"Food from the kitchen, you mean?"

"No, food from the students' own rooms. It is a Junior crime, and usually disappears spontaneously. It is not a sign of vice, you know. Merely of a weak will. A student who would not dream of taking money or a trinket can't resist a piece of cake. Especially if it is sweet cake. They use up so much energy that their bodies are crying out for sugar; and though there is no limit to what they may eat at table they are for ever hungry."

"Yes, they do work very hard. What proportion of any one set finishes the course, would you say?"

"Of this lot"-Henrietta nodded down to where a group of Seniors were strolling out across the courtyard to the lawn-"eighty per cent are finishing. That is about average. Those who fall by the wayside do it in their first term, or perhaps their second."

"But not all, surely. There must be accidents in a life like this."

"Oh, yes, there are accidents." Henrietta turned and began to climb the further flight.

"That girl whose place Teresa Desterro took, was it an accident that overtook her?"

"No," said Henrietta shortly, "she had a breakdown."

Lucy, climbing the shallow steps in the wake of her friend's broad beam, recognised the tone. It was the tone in which Henrietta, the head-girl, used to say: "And see that no goloshes are left lying about the cloakroom floor." It did not permit of further discussion.

Henrietta, it was to be understood, did not like to think of her beloved College as a Moloch. College was a bright gateway to the future for deserving youth; and if one or two found the gateway a hazard rather than an opening, then it was unfortunate but no reflection on the builders of the gateway.

"Like a convent," Nash had said yesterday morning. "No time to think of an outside world." That was true. She had watched a day's routine go by. She had also seen the Students' two daily papers lying unopened in the common-room last night as they went in to supper. But a nunnery, if it was a narrow world, was also a placid one. Uncompetitive. Assured. There was nothing of the nunnery about this over-anxious, wildly strenuous life. Only the self-absorption was the same; the narrowness.

And yet was it so narrow, she wondered, considering the gathering in the drawing-room? If this were any other kind of college that gathering would have been homogeneous. If it were a college of science the gathering would consist of scientists; if it were a college of divinity, of theologians. But in this long charming room, with its good «pieces» and its chintzes, with its tall windows pushed up so that the warm evening flowed in through them full of grass and roses, in this one room many worlds met. Madame Lefevre, reclining in thin elegance on a hard Empire sofa and smoking a yellow cigarette in a green holder, represented a world theatrical; a world of grease-paint, art, and artifice. Miss Lux, sitting upright in a hard chair, represented the academical world; the world of universities, text-books, and discussion. Young Miss Wragg, busy pouring out coffee, was the world of sport; a physical, competitive, unthinking world. And the evening's guest Dr Enid Knight, one of the «visiting» Staff, stood for the medical world. The foreign world was not present: Sigrid Gustavsen had retired with her mother, who spoke no English, to her own room where they could chatter together in Swedish.

All these worlds had gone to make the finished article that was a Leaving Student; it was at least not the training that was narrow.

"And what do you think of our students, Miss Pym, now that you have had a whole afternoon with them?" Madame Lefevre asked, turning the battery of her enormous dark eyes on Lucy.

A damn silly question, thought Lucy; and wondered how a good respectable middle-class English couple had produced anything so like the original serpent as Madame Lefevre. "I think," she said, glad to be able to be honest, "that there is not one of them who is not an advertisement for Leys." And she saw Henrietta's heavy face light up. College was Henrietta's world. She lived and moved and had her being in the affairs of Leys; it was her father, mother, lover, and child.

"They *are* a nice lot," agreed Doreen Wragg happily, not yet far removed from her own student days and regarding her pupils with cameraderie.

"They are as the beasts that perish," said Miss Lux incisively. "They think that Botticelli is a variety of spaghetti." She inspected with deep gloom the coffee that Miss Wragg handed to her. "If it comes to that, they don't know what spaghetti is. It's not long since Dakers stood up in the middle of a Dietetics lecture and accused me of destroying her illusions."

"It surprises me to know that anything about Miss Dakers is destructible," observed Madame Lefevre, in her brown velvet drawl.

"What illusion had you destroyed?" the young doctor asked from the window-seat.

"I had just informed them that spaghetti and its relations were made from a paste of flour. That shattered for ever, apparently, Dakers' picture of Italy."

"How had she pictured it?"

"Fields of waving macaroni, so she said."

Henrietta turned from putting two lumps of sugar in a very small cup of coffee (*How* nice, thought Lucy wistfully, to have a figure like a sack of flour and not to mind!) and said: "At least they are free from crime."

"Crime?" they said, puzzled.

"Miss Pym has just been enquiring about the incidence of crime at Leys. That is what it is to be a psychologist."

Before Lucy could protest against this version of her simple search for knowledge, Madame Lefevre said: "Well, let us oblige her. Let us turn out the rag-bag of our shameful past. What crime have we had?"

"Farthing was had up last Christmas term for riding her bike without lights," volunteered Miss Wragg.

"Crime," said Madame Lefevre. "Crime. Not petty misdemeanours."

"If you mean a plain wrong-un, there was that dreadful creature who was man-crazy and used to spend Saturday evenings hanging round the barrack gate in Larborough."

"Yes," said Miss Lux, remembering. "What became of *her* when we tossed her out, does anyone know?"

"She is doing the catering at a Seamen's Refuge in Plymouth," Henrietta said, and opened her eyes when they laughed. "I don't know what is funny about that. The only real crime we have had in ten years, as you very well know, was the watches affair. And even that," she added, jealous for her beloved institution, "was a fixation rather than plain theft. She took nothing but watches, and she made no use of them. Kept them all in a drawer of her bureau, quite openly. Nine, there were. A fixation, of course."

"By precedent, I suppose she is now with the Goldsmiths and Silversmiths," said Madame Lefevre.

"I don't know," said Henrietta, seriously. "I think her people kept her at home. They were quite well-to-do."

"Well, Miss Pym, the incidence appears to be point-something per cent." Madame Lefevre waved a thin brown hand. "We are an unsensational crowd."

"Too normal by half," Miss Wragg volunteered. "A little spot of scandal would be nice now and again. A nice change from hand-stands and upward circlings."

"I should like to see some hand-stands and upward-circlings," Lucy said. "Would it be all right if I came and watched the Seniors tomorrow morning?"

But of course she must see the Seniors, Henrietta said. They were busy with their Demonstration programme, so it would be a private Demonstration all for herself. "They are one of the best sets we ever had," she said.

"Can I have first go of the gym. when the Seniors are doing their Final Phys. on Tuesday?" Miss Wragg asked; and they began to discuss time-tables.

Miss Pym moved over to the window-seat and joined Dr Knight.

"Are you responsible for the cross-section of something called the villi?" she asked.

"Oh, no; physiology is an ordinary college subject: Catherine Lux takes that."

"Then what do you lecture on?"

"Oh, different things at different stages. Public Health. The so-called 'social' diseases. The even more so-called Facts of Life. Your subject."

"Psvchologv?"

"Yes. Public Health is my job, but psychology is my specialty. I liked your book so much. So common sensical. I admired that. It is so easy to be high-falutin about an abstract subject."

Lucy flushed a little. There is no praise so gratifying as that of a colleague.

"And of course I am the College medical advisor," Dr Knight went on, looking amused. "A sinecure if ever there was one. They are a disgustingly healthy crowd."

'But-" Lucy began. It is the outsider, Desterro (she was thinking), who insists on their abnormality. If it is true, then surely this trained observer, also from the outside, must be aware of it.

"They have accidents, of course," the doctor said, misunderstanding Lucy's 'but. "Their life is a long series of minor accidents-bruises, and sprains, and dislocated fingers, and what not-but it is very rarely that anything serious happens. Bentley has been the only instance in my time-the girl whose room you have. She broke a leg, and won't be back till next term."

"But-it is a strenuous training, a gruelling life; do they never break down under it?"

"Yes. That's not unknown. The last term is particularly trying. A concentration of horrors from the student's point of view. Crit. classes, and-"

"Crit. classes?"

"Yes. They each have to take a gym. and a dancing class in the presence of the united Staff and their own set, and are judged according to the show they make. Nerve-shattering. These are all over, the crit. classes; but there are still the Finals, and the Demonstration, and being given jobs, and the actual parting from student life, and what not. Yes, it is a strain for them, poor dears. But they are amazingly resilient. No one who wasn't would have survived so long. Let me get you some more coffee. I'm going to have some."

She took Lucy's cup and went away to the table; and Lucy leaned back in the folds of the curtain and looked at the garden. The sun had set, and the outlines were growing blurred; there was the first hint of dew in the soft air that blew up against her face. Somewhere on the other side of the house (in the students' common-room?) a piano was being played and a girl was singing. It was a charming voice: effortless and pure, without professional tricks and without fashionable dealing in quarter-tones. The song, moreover, was a ballad; old-fashioned and sentimental, but devoid of self-pity and posing. A frank young voice and a frank old song. It shocked Lucy to realise how long it was since she had heard any voice raised in song that was not a product of valves and batteries. In London at this moment the exhausted air was loud with radios; but here, in this cool, scented garden, a girl was singing for the love of it.

I have been too long in London, she thought; I must have a change. Find a hotel on the South Coast, perhaps. Or go abroad. One forgets that the world is young.

"Who is singing?" she asked, as her cup was handed to her again.

"Stewart, I think," Dr Knight said, not interested. "Miss Pym, you can save my life if you like to."

Lucy said that to save a doctor's life would give her immense satisfaction.

"I want to go to a medical conference in London," Dr Knight said in a conspiratorial undertone. "It is on Thursday, but that is the day of my psychology lecture. Miss Hodge thinks I am for ever going to conferences, so I can't possibly beg off again. But if you were to take that lecture for me, everything would be grand."

"But I am going back to London myself tomorrow after lunch."

"No!" said Dr Knight, much dashed. "Do you have to?"

"Oddly enough, I was just thinking how much I should hate going back."

"Then don't go. Stay on for a day or two, and save my life. Do, Miss Pym."

"And what would Henrietta think of the substitution?"

"That, of course, is sheer affectation, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I'm not a best-seller, I'm not a celebrity, I'm not the author of the latest text-book on the subject-"

Lucy made a small gesture acknowledging her fault, but her eyes were on the garden. Why should she go back to London yet? What was there to take her back? Nothing and nobody. For the first time that fine, independent, cushioned, celebrated life of hers looked just a little bleak. A little narrow and inhuman. Could it be? Was there, perhaps, a lack of warmth in that existence she had been so content with? Not a lack of human contact, certainly. She had her fill of human contact. But it was a very all-of-a-piece contact, now that she thought of it. Except for Mrs Montmorency from one of the suburbs of Manchester, who was her daily help, and her Aunt Celia down in Walberswick, who sometimes had her for weekends, and the tradespeople, she never talked to anyone who wasn't somehow connected with the publishing or the academic worlds. And though all the ladies and gentlemen belonging to these two worlds were, of course, both intelligent and amusing, there was no denying that their interests were limited. You couldn't, for instance, talk to one and the same person about Social Security, hill-billy songs, and what won the 3.30. They each had their "subject." And their subject, she found to her cost, was only too likely to be royalties. Lucy herself had only the vaguest idea about royalties; especially her own, and could never keep her end up in this sort of conversation.

Besides, none of them was young.

At least, not young as these children here were young. Young in years a few of her acquaintances might be, but they were already bowed down with the weight of the world's wrongs and their own importance. It was nice to meet a morning-of-the-world youngness for a change.

And it was nice to be liked.

There was no good in trying to diddle herself about why she wanted to stay a little longer; why she was seriously prepared to forgo the delights of civilisation that had seemed so desirable-so imperatively desirable-only yesterday morning. It was nice to be liked.

In the last few years she had been ignored, envied, admired, kow-towed to, and cultivated; but warm, personal liking was something she had not had since the Lower Fourth said goodbye to her, with a home-made pen-wiper and a speech by Gladys Someone-or-other, shortly after her legacy. To stay in this atmosphere of youth, of liking, of warmth, she was willing to overlook for a space the bells, the beans, and the bathrooms.

"Knight," said young Miss Wragg, raising her voice from the conversation behind them, "did the Disciples ask you about giving them an introduction to some doctor or other in Manchester?"

"Oh, yes, they asked me. In concert. I said yes, of course. As a matter of fact, I was glad to; I think they will be a great success."

"Individually, the Disciples are null and void," Miss Lux said. "But collectively they have a quadruple ruthlessness that will be very useful in Lancashire. It is the only occasion I have ever come across when nothing multiplied by four became something like six-and-a-half. If nobody wants the *Sunday Times* I shall take it to bed with me."

No one apparently wanted it. It had been lying unopened in the drawing-room after lunch when Lucy had been the first to look at it, and as far as she had noticed no one except Miss Lux had picked it up since.

"This set of Seniors are planting themselves out very nicely. Almost without our help," Madame Lefevre said. "There will be less heart-burning than usual." She did not sound very sorry about the heart-burning; just sardonic.

"It continually surprises me," said Miss Hodge, not at all sardonic, "how each year the students slip into their appropriate places in the world's work. The openings come up as the students are ready to fill them. Almost like — like two pieces of the same machine. So surprising and so satisfactory. I don't think we have had a misfit in all my years at Leys. I had a letter from the Cordwainers School, by the way; in Edinburgh, you know. Mulcaster is getting married and they want someone in her place. You will remember Mulcaster, Marie?" She turned to Madame Lefevre who, except for Henrietta, was the Oldest Inhabitant-and who, incidentally, had been christened plain Mary.

"Of course I remember her. A lump without leaven," said Madame, who judged everyone by their capacity to execute *rondes de jambes*.

"A nice girl," Henrietta said placidly. "I think Cordwainers will be a very good place for Sheena Stewart."

"Have you told her about it?" Miss Wragg asked.

"No, oh, no; I always like to sleep on things."

"Hatch them out, you mean," Madame said. "You must have heard about Cordwainers before lunch-time yesterday because that was the last post, and it is only now we hear about it."

"It was not very important," Henrietta said defensively; and then added with what was nearly a simper: "But I *have* heard rumours of a 'plum, a really wonderful chance for someone."

"Tell us," they said.

But Henrietta said no; that no official notice had come, that no official notice or application might come at all, and until it did it was better not to talk about it. But she still looked pleased and mysterious.

"Well, I'm going to bed," Miss Lux said, picking up the *Times* and turning her back on Henrietta's elephantine coyness. "You are not going before lunch tomorrow, are you, Miss Pym?"

"Well," said Lucy, pitchforked of a sudden into decision, "I wondered if I might stay on for a day or two? You did ask me to, you

know," she reminded Henrietta. "It has been so nice-So interesting to watch a world so different-And it is so lovely here, so-" Oh, dear, why must she sound so idiotic. Would she never learn to behave like Lucy Pym the Celebrity?

But her stammerings were swamped in the loud wave of their approval. Lucy was touched to note a gleam of pleasure even on the face of Miss Lux.

"Stay on till Thursday and take my Senior Psychology lecture, and let me go to a conference in London," Dr Knight suggested, as if it had just occurred to her.

"Oh, I don't know whether-" began Lucy, all artistic doubt, and looked at Henrietta.

"Dr Knight is always running away to conferences," Miss Hodge said, disapproving but without heat. "But of course we would be delighted and honoured, Lucy, if you agreed to give the students a second lecture."

"I should like to. It would be nice to feel myself a temporary member of the Staff, instead of a mere guest. I should like to very much." She turned in rising to wink at Dr Knight, who was squeezing her arm in a rapture of gratitude. "And now I think I must get back to the student wing."

She said goodnight and went out with Miss Lux.

Lux eyed her sideways as they moved together to the back of the house, but Lucy, catching the glance, thought that there was a friendly gleam in that ice-grey eye.

"Do you really like this menagerie?" Lux asked. "Or are you just looking for things to stick on cardboard with pins?"

That was what The Nut Tart had asked yesterday afternoon. Have you come looking for specimens? Well, she would make the same answer and see what Lux's reaction would be.

"Oh, I'm staying because I like it. A college of Physical Training wouldn't be a very good place to look for the abnormal, anyhow, would it." She made it a statement, not a question; and waited.

"Why not?" asked Miss Lux. "Sweating oneself into a coma may stultify the reason but it doesn't destroy the emotions."

"Doesn't it?" Lucy said, surprised. "If I were dog-tired I'm certain I wouldn't have any feelings about anything but going to sleep quickly."

"Going to sleep dead tired is all right; normal, and pleasant, and safe. It is when one wakens up dead tired that the trouble begins."

"What trouble?"

"The hypothetical trouble of this discussion," Lux said, smoothly.

"And is wakening up dead tired a common thing, would you say?"

"Well, I'm not their medical adviser so I can't run round with a stethoscope and fond inquiries, but I should say that five Seniors out of six in their last term are so tired that each morning is a mild nightmare. It is when one is as tired as that that one's emotional state ceases to be normal. A tiny obstacle becomes an Everest in the path; a careless comment becomes a grievance to be nursed; a small disappointment is all of a sudden a suicidal affair."

There swam up in Lucy's mind a vision of that circle of faces at tea-time. Brown, laughing, happy faces; careless and for the most part notably confident. Where in that relaxed and healthy crowd had there been the least hint of strain, of bad temper? Nowhere. They had moaned over their hard lot certainly, but it was a humourous and detached complaint.

Tired they might be; in fact tired they certainly were-it would be a miracle if they were not; but tired to the point of abnormality, no. Lucy could not believe it.

"This is my room," Lux said, and paused. "Have you something to read? I don't suppose you brought anything if you meant to go back yesterday. Can I lend you something?"

She opened the door, exhibiting a neat bed-sitting-room of which the sole decorations were one engraving, one photograph, and an entire wainscotting of books. From next-door came the babble of Swedish chat.

"Poor Froken," Lux said unexpectedly, as Lucy cocked an ear.

"She has been so homesick. It must be wonderful to be able to talk family gossip in one's own tongue again." And then, seeing Lucy's eyes on the photograph: "My young sister."

"She is very lovely," Lucy said; and hoped instantly that there had been no hint of surprise in her tone.

"Yes." Lux was drawing the curtains. "I hate moths. Do you? She was born when I was in my teens, and I have practically brought her up. She is in her third year at Medical school." She came and stood for a moment looking at the photograph with Lucy. "Well, what can I give you to read? Anything from Runyon to Proust."

Lucy took *The Young Visiters*. It was a long time since she had read it last, but she found that she was smiling at the very sight of it. A sort of reflex action; quite involuntary. And when she looked up she found that Lux was smiling too.

"Well, that is one thing I shall never do," Lucy said regretfully.

"What?"

"Write a book that makes all the world smile."

"Not all the world," Lux said, her smile broadening. "I had a cousin who stopped half-way through. When I asked her why, she said: 'So *unlikely*."

So Lucy went smiling away towards bed, glad that she was not going to catch that train tomorrow, and thinking about the plain Miss Lux who loved a beautiful sister and liked absurdity. As she turned into the long corridor of the E-wing she saw Beau Nash standing at the angle of the stairs at the far end, in the act of lifting a hand-bell to shoulder height, and in another second the wild yelling of it filled the wing. She stood where she was, her hands over her ears, while Beau laughed at her and swung the evil thing with a will. Lovely, she was, standing there with that instrument of torture in her hands.

"Is ringing the 'bedroom' bell the Head Girl's duty?" Lucy asked, as Beau at last ceased to swing.

"No, the Seniors take week-about; it just happens to be my week. Being well down the list alphabetically I don't have more than one week each term." She looked at Miss Pym and lowered her voice in mock-confidence. "I pretend to be glad about that-everyone thinks it a frightful bore to have to watch the clock-but I love making a row."

Yes, thought Lucy; no nerves and a body brimming with health; of course she would love the row. And then, almost automatically,

wondered if it was not the row that she liked but the feeling of power in her hands. But no, she dismissed that thought; Nash was the one that life had been easy for; the one who had, all her life, had only to ask, or take, in order to have. She had no need of vicarious satisfactions; her life was one long satisfaction. She liked the wild clamour of the bell; that was all.

"Anyhow," Nash said, falling into step with her, "it isn't the 'bedroom bell. It's 'Lights Out. '

"I had no idea it was so late. Does that apply to me?"

"Of course not. Olympus does as it likes."

"Even a boarded-out Olympus?"

"Here is your hovel," Nash said, switching on the light and standing aside to let Lucy enter the bright little cell, so gay and antiseptic in the unshaded brilliance. After the subtleties of the summer evening and the grace of the Georgian drawing-room, it was like an illustration from one of the glossier American magazines. "I am glad I happened to see you because I have a confession to make. I won't be bringing your breakfast tomorrow."

"Oh, that is all right," Lucy was beginning, "I ought to get up in any case-"

"No, I don't mean that. Of course not. It is just that young Morris asked if she might do it-she is one of the Juniors-and-"

"The abductor of George?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot you were there. Yes, that one. And she seemed to think that her life would not be complete unless she had brought up your breakfast on your last morning, so I said that as long as she didn't ask for your autograph or otherwise make a nuisance of herself, she could. I hope you don't mind. She is a nice child, and it would really give her pleasure."

Lucy, who didn't mind if her breakfast was brought by a wall-eyed and homicidal negro so long as she could eat the leathery toast in peace and quiet, said she was grateful to young Morris, and anyhow it wasn't going to be her last morning. She was going to stay on and take a lecture on Thursday.

"You are! Oh, that's wonderful. I'm so glad. Everyone will be glad. You are so good for us."

"A medicine?" Lucy wrinkled her nose in protest.

"No, a tonic."

"Somebody's Syrup," Lucy said; but she was pleased.

So pleased that even pushing little hairpins into their appointed places did not bore her with the customary frenzy of boredom. She creamed her face and considered it, unadorned and greasy in the bright hard light, with unaccustomed tolerance. There was no doubt that being a little on the plump side kept the lines away; if you had to have a face like a scone it was at least comforting that it was a smooth scone. And, now she came to think of it, one was given the looks that were appropriate; if she had Garbo's nose she would have to dress up to it, and if she had Miss Lux's cheek-bones she would have to live up to them. Lucy had never been able to live up to anything. Not even The Book.

Remembering in time that there was no bedside light-students were discouraged from working in bed-she switched the light off and crossed to pull aside the curtains of the window looking out on the courtyard. She stood there by the wide-open window, smelling the cool scented night. A great stillness had settled on Leys. The chatter, the bells, the laughter, the wild protests, the drumming of feet, the rush of bath water, the coming and going, had crystallised into this great silent bulk, a deeper darkness in the quiet dark.

"Miss Pym."

The whisper came from one of the windows opposite.

Could they see her, then? No, of course not. Someone had heard the small noise of her curtains being drawn back.

"Miss Pym, we are so glad you are staying."

So much for the college grape-vine! Not fifteen minutes since Nash said goodnight, but already the news was in the opposite wing. Before she could answer, a chorus of whispers came from the unseen windows round the little quadrangle. Yes, Miss Pym. We are glad. Glad, Miss Pym. Yes. Yes. Glad, Miss Pym.

"Goodnight, everyone," Lucy said.

Goodnight, they said. Goodnight. So glad. Goodnight.

She wound her watch and pulled up a chair to put it on-the chair, rather: there was only one-so that there should be no burrowing under pillows for it in the morning; and thought how odd it was that only yesterday morning she could not wait to get out of this place.

And perhaps it was because no self-respecting psychologist would have anything to do with a thing so outmoded as Premonition that no small helpful imp from the Unexplainable was there to whisper in her drowsy ear: "Go away from here. Go away while the going is good. Go away. Away from here."

The chairs scraped on the parquet floor as the students rose from their kneeling position, and turned to wait while the Staff filed out of morning prayers. Lucy, having become "temporary Staff," had made the gesture of attending this 8.45 ceremony as an off-set to the un-staff-like indulgence of breakfast in bed; and she had spent the last few minutes considering the collective legs of College as spread before her in kneeling rows and marvelling at their individuality. Dress was uniform at this hour of the morning, and heads were bowed in dutiful hands, but a pair of legs were as easy to identify as a face, she found. There they were: stubborn legs, frivolous legs, neat legs, dull legs, doubtful legs-already she needed only a turn of calf and piece of ankle to say: Dakers, or Innes, or Rouse, or Beau, as the case might be. Those elegant ones at the end of the first row were The Nut Tart. Did the nuns not mind that their protege should listen to Anglican prayers, then? And those rather stick-like ones were Campbell, and those-

"Amen," said Henrietta, with unction.

"Amen," murmured the students of Leys, and rose to their feet with the scraping of chairs. And Lucy filed out with the Staff.

"Come in and wait while I arrange this morning's post," Henrietta said, "and then I'll go over to the gymnasium with you," and she led the way into her own sitting-room, where a meek little part-time secretary was waiting for instructions. Lucy sat down on the window seat with the *Telegraph*, and listened with only half an ear to the professional conversation that followed. Mrs So-and-so had written to ask the date of the Demonstration, Mrs Someone-else wanted to know whether there was a hotel near-by where she and her husband could stay when they came to see their daughter perform, the receipt for the butcher must be looked out and presented to his disbelieving eye, the special lecturer for the last Friday of term had cried off, three Prospective Parents wanted prospectuses.

"All quite straightforward, I think," Henrietta said.

"Yes," agreed the meek little secretary. "I'll get on with them at once. There was a letter from Arlinghurst. It doesn't seem to be here."

"No," Henrietta said. "That can be answered later in the week."

Arlinghurst, Lucy's mind said. Arlinghurst. The school for girls, of course. A sort of female Eton. "I was at Arlinghurst," they said, and that settled it. She took her attention from the *Telegraph* leader for a moment and thought that if the «plum» that Henrietta had been waiting for was Arlinghurst then indeed it was going to create more than the usual stir among the interested Seniors. She was on the point of asking whether Arlinghurst was in fact the "plum," but was stopped partly by the presence of the meek little secretary but more immediately by the expression on Henrietta's face. Henrietta-there was no denying it-Henrietta had a wary, a sort of guilty, look. The look of a person who is Up To Something.

Oh, well, thought Lucy, if she is merely hugging her lovely secret to herself, let her. I shan't spoil it for her. She followed her friend down the long corridor that ran the length of the wing, and out to the covered way that continued the corridor to the gymnasium. The gymnasium lay parallel to the house and to the right-angled wing, so that from the air the buildings made a complete letter E; the three horizontal strokes being "old house," the right-angled wing, and the gymnasium; the vertical stroke being the connecting wing and the covered way.

The door to which the covered way led was open, and from inside the gymnasium came the sounds of uncoordinated activity; voices, laughter, thudding feet. Henrietta paused by the open door and pointed through to the door on the other side, now closed. "That is the college crime," she said. "Crossing the gymnasium to the field-path instead of using the appointed covered way round the building. That is why we have had to lock it up. One wouldn't think that a few extra steps would mean much to students who took so many in the day, but there was no argument or threat which would stop them using the short cut through. So we removed the temptation altogether."

She turned from the open door and led the way to the other end of the building, where a small porch held the stairway to the gallery. As they climbed the stairs Henrietta paused to point to a piece of mechanism on a low trolley, which filled the well of the staircase. "That," she said, "is the most famous College character of all. That is our vacuum cleaner; known from here to New Zealand as The Abhorrence."

"Why abhorrent?" Lucy asked.

"It used to be Nature's Abhorrence, but it became shortened to The Abhorrence. You remember the tag one is taught at school: Nature abhors a vacuum." She looked a moment longer at the monstrous object, caressing it with her eyes. "It cost us a deplorable sum, The Abhorrence, but it was money well spent. However well the gymnasium was cleaned in the old days, there was always a residue of dust, which was beaten into the air by the students' feet and sucked up, of course, by the students' respiratory passages; and the result was catarrh. Not universal, of course, but there never was a time, summer or winter, when some student or other was not having a bout of catarrh. It was Dr Knight's predecessor who suggested that it might be invisible dust that was responsible, and she was right. Since we squandered that immense sum on The Abhorrence there has been no more catarrh. And of course," she added happily, "it was a saving in the end since it is Giddy the gardener's job to vacuum the gymnasium now, and we don't have to pay cleaners."

Lucy stopped as they reached the top of the stairs, and looked over the railings into the well again. "I don't think I like it. It is very well named, it seems to me. There is something obscene about it."

"It is unbelievably powerful. And very easy to work. It takes Giddy only about twenty minutes every morning, and when he has finished there is, as he says himself, 'nothing left but the fixtures. He is very proud of The Abhorrence. He grooms it as if it were an animal." Henrietta opened the door at the top of the stairs and they entered the gallery.

A gymnasium as a building does not permit of architecture. It is purely functional. It is an oblong box, lit by windows which are either in the roof or high up the walls. The gymnasium at Leys had windows where the walls met the roof, which is not a beautiful arrangement; but through their far-away panes at no hour of any day could direct sunlight blind a student's eyes, and so cause an

accident. The great oblong box of a building was filled with the reflected radiance of a summer morning; golden and soft. Across the floor were scattered the Senior students, limbering up, practising, criticising, and in a few happy instances playing the fool.

"Do they mind an audience?" Lucy asked as they sat down.

"They are very used to one. Hardly a day goes by without a visitor of some kind."

"What is under the gallery? What is it they watch all the time?"

"Themselves," said Henrietta succinctly. "The whole wall below the gallery is one long mirror."

Lucy admired the impersonal interest on the faces of the students as they watched their reflected performances. To be able to view one's physical entity with such critical detachment was surely no bad thing.

"It is one of the griefs of my life," the dutch-doll Gage was saying, looking at her up-stretched arms, "that my arms have that kink at the elbow."

"If you listened to that Friday-friend and used your will-power, you'd have them straight by now," Stewart observed, not pausing in her own contortions.

"Probably bent back the other way," Beau Nash mocked, from a doubled-up position at the rib-stalls.

Lucy deduced that a Friday-friend was the «interest» lecturer who appeared on Friday evenings; and wondered idly whether that particular one had called his subject «faith» or «mind-over-matter»; was it Lourdes or was it Coue?

Hasselt, the South African with the flat Primitive face, was clutching Innes's ankles in the air while Innes stood on her hands. "*Reeeee-*ly on thee *arrrr*ms, Mees Innes," Hasselt was saying, in a would-be Swedish accent that was evidently a quotation from Froken; and Innes laughed and collapsed. Looking at them, flushed and smiling (this, she thought, is the first time I have seen Mary Innes smile) Lucy felt again how out-of-place these two faces were. Hasselt's belonged above a Madonna-blue robe, with a tiny landscape of hills and castles and roads somewhere at her left ear. And Innes's to a portrait on some ancestral staircase-seventeenth century, perhaps? No, too gay, too adaptable, too arched-of-eye-brow. Sixteenth century, rather. Withdrawn, uncompromising, unforgiving; the-stake-or-nothing.

Away by herself in a far corner was Rouse, painstakingly stretching her ham-strings by walking her palms up to her feet. She couldn't really *need* to stretch her ham-strings, not after years of continued stretching, so presumably this was merely a North-Country example of "makking siccar." There was no fooling about for Miss Rouse; life was real, life was earnest; life was long ham-strings and a good post in the offing. Lucy wished she liked Miss Rouse better, and looked round for Dakers as a sort of antidote. But there was no tow-head and cheerful pony-face among the collection.

And then, suddenly, the desultory noise and the chatter faded.

No one had come in by the open door at the far end, but there was beyond doubt a Presence in the place. Lucy could feel it coming up through the gallery floor at her feet. She remembered that there was a door at the foot of the stairway; where The Abhorrence stood. Someone had come in down there.

There was no audible word of command, but the students, who a moment before had been scattered over the floor like beads from a broken string, were now, as if by magic, standing in a still, waiting line.

Froken Gustavsen walked out from under the gallery, and surveyed them.

"Unt wvere ees Mees Dakers?" she asked in a cool small voice. But even as she said it a flustered Dakers ran in through the open door, and stopped short as she saw the picture that waited her.

"Oh, catastrophe!" she wailed, and darted to the gap that someone had accommodatingly left for her. "Oh, I am sorry, Froken. Abyssmally sorry. It was just that-"

"Ees eet proposed to be laate at the Demonstraation?" asked Froken, with almost scientific interest.

"Oh, no, of course not, Froken. It was just that-"

"We know. We know. Something was lost, or broke. Eef eet wass possible to come to thees plaace naakid, Mees Dakers would still find something to lose or break. Attention!"

They came to attention, and were motionless except for their quick breathing.

"Eef Mees Thomas were to pull een her stow-mach the line would be improved, I theenk."

Thomas obliged instantly.

"Unt Mees Appleyard shows too much cheen."

The plump little girl with the red cheeks pulled her chin further into her neck. "So!"

They right-turned into file, covered, and marched in single file down the gymnasium; their feet falling so lightly on the hard wood floor that they were almost inaudible.

"Quieter, quieter. Lightly, lightly!"

Was it possible?

But it was possible, apparently. Still more quietly fell those long-trained feet, until it was unbelievable that a collection of solid young females weighing individually anything up to ten stones were marching, marching, round the hall.

Lucy slid an eye round to Henrietta; and almost instantly switched it away again. The fond pride on Henrietta's large pale countenance was startling, almost painful, to see; and for a little Lucy forgot the students below and thought about Henrietta. Henrietta of the sack-line figure and the conscientious soul. Henrietta who had had elderly parents, no sisters, and the instincts of a mother hen. No one had ever lain awake at night over Henrietta; or walked back and fore in the darkness outside her house; or even, perhaps, sent her flowers. (Which reminded her to wonder where Alan was nowadays; there had been several weeks, one spring, when she had thought quite seriously of accepting Alan, in spite of his Adam's apple. It would be nice, she had thought, to be cherished for a change. What had stopped her was the realisation that the cherishing would have to be mutual. That she would inevitably have to mend socks, for instance. She didn't like feet. Even Alan's.) Henrietta had been apparently doomed to a dull if worthy life. But it had not turned out like that. If the expression on her unguarded face had been any criterion, Henrietta had built for herself a life that was full, rich, and satisfying. She had said, in her first re-union gossip with Lucy, that when she took over Leys a decade ago it had been a small and not very popular college, and that she and Leys had flourished together; that she was, in fact, a partner now as well as Principal, and

partner in a flourishing concern. But until she had surprised that look on Henrietta's face, Lucy had not realised how much her old friend identified herself with her work. That College was her world, she knew; Henrietta talked of little else. But absorption in a business was one thing, and the emotion on Henrietta's face was quite another.

She was roused from her speculations by the sound of apparatus being dragged out. The students had stopped arching themselves into bows at the rib-stalls, puffed out like figureheads on a ship, and were now bringing out the booms. Lucy's shins ached with remembered pain; how often had she barked her bones against that unyielding piece of wood; certainly one of the compensations of middle-age was not having to do uncomfortable things.

The wooden upright was now standing in the middle of the floor, and the two booms were fitted into its grooved sides and hoisted as high as hands could reach. The iron pins with wooden handles shot home through their appointed holes in the upright to hold the booms up, and there was the instrument of torture ready. Not that it was shin-barking time yet; that would come later. Just now it was only "travelling." Two by two, one at each end, the students proceeded along the boom, hanging by their hands, monkey-wise. First sideways, then backwards, and lastly with a rotary movement, like a travelling top. All this was done with monotonous perfection until it was Rouse's turn to rotate. Rouse had bent her knees for the spring to the boom, and then dropped her hands and looked at her instructor with a kind of panic on her tight, freckled face.

"Oh, Froken," she said, "I'm not going to be able to do it."

"Nonsense, Mees Rouse," Froken said, encouraging but not surprised (this was apparently a repetition of some previous scene), "you have done eet perfectly since you were a Junior. You do it now of course."

In a strained silence Rouse sprang to the boom and began her progress along it. For half its length she performed with professional expertness, and then for no apparent reason her hand missed the boom as she turned, and her body swung away, suspended by her other hand. She made an effort to recover herself, pulling up with her sustaining hand, but the rhythm had broken and she dropped to her feet.

"I knew it," she said. "I'm going to be like Kenyon, Froken. Just like Kenyon."

"Mees Rouse; you are not going to be like anyone. It is knack, that. And for a moment you haf lost the knack, that is all. You will try again."

Rouse sprang once more to the boom above her head.

"No!" said the Swede with emphasis; and Rouse came back to the ground looking inquiring.

"Not saying: Oh, dear, I cannot do eet. But saying: This I do often, with ease, and now also. So!"

Twice more Rouse tried, and failed.

"Ve-ry well, Mees Rouse. That will do. One half of the boom will be put up last thing at night, as it is now, and you will come een the morning early and practise, until the knack has come back."

"Poor Rouse," Lucy said, as the booms were being reversed for balance exercises, flat side up instead of rounded.

"Yes, such a pity," Henrietta said. "One of our most brilliant students."

"Brilliant?" said Lucy, surprised. It was not an adjective she would have applied to Rouse.

"In physical work, anyhow. Most brilliant. She finds written work a difficulty, but makes up for it by hard work. A model student, and a great credit to Leys. Such a pity about this little nervous development. Over-anxiety, of course. It happens sometimes. Usually over something quite simple, strangely enough."

"What did she mean by 'being like Kenyon'? That is the girl whose place Teresa Desterro took, isn't it?"

"Yes. How clever of you to remember. That was a case in point. Kenyon suddenly decided that she could not balance. She had always had abnormally good balance, and there was no reason why she should lose it. But she began by being wobbly, took to jumping off in the middle of an exercise, and ended by being unable to get up from sitting position on the boom. She sat there and clung to the boom like a frightened child. Sat there and cried."

"Some inner insufficiency."

"Of course. It was not the balance that she was frightened of. But we had to send her home. We are hoping that she will come back to finish her training when she has had a long rest. She was very happy here."

Was she? thought Lucy. So happy that she broke down. What had reduced the girl who was good at balance to a crying and shivering piece of misery, clutching at the boom?

She watched with a new interest the progress of the balancing that had been poor Kenyon's Waterloo. Two by two the students somersaulted upwards on to the high boom, turned to a sitting position sideways, and then slowly stood up on the narrow ledge. Slowly one leg lifted, the muscles rippling in the light, the arms performed their appointed evolution. The faces were calm, intent. The bodies obedient, sure, and accustomed. When the exercise was finished they sank until they were sitting on their heels, upright and easy, put forward blind hands to seize the boom, descended to sideways sitting once more, and from there to a forward somersault and so the ground again.

No one fluffed or failed. The perfection was unblemished. Even Froken found no word to say. Lucy found that she had been holding her breath. She sat back and relaxed and breathed deeply.

"That was lovely. At school the balance was much lower, wasn't it, and so it was not exciting."

Henrietta looked pleased. "Sometimes I come in just to see the balance and nothing else. So many people like the more spectacular items. The vaulting and so on. But I find the quiet control of the balance very satisfying."

The vaulting, when it came, was spectacular enough. The obstacles were, to Lucy's eyes, horrific; and she looked with uncomprehending wonder at the delighted faces of the students. They *liked* this. They liked launching themselves into nothingness, flying through the air to problematical landings, twisting and somersaulting. The restraint that had characterised their attitude up to now had vanished; there was verve in their every movement, a sort of laughter; living was good and this was a physical expression of their joy in living. Amazed, she watched the Rouse who had stumbled and failed over the simple boom exercise, performing hair-raising feats of perfection that must require the maximum of courage, control, and "knack." (Henrietta had been right, her physical performance was brilliant. She was also, no doubt, a brilliant games player; her timing was excellent. But still that «brilliant» stuck in

Lucy's throat. «Brilliant» meant someone like Beau; an all-round fineness; body, mind, and spirit.)

"Mees Dakers! Take the left hand off at wons. Is eet mountaineering you are?"

"I didn't mean to leave it so long, Froken. Really I didn't."

"That is understood. It is the not meaning to that ees rrreprehensible. Come again, after Mees Mathews."

Dakers came again, and this time managed to make her rebellious hand release its grip at the appropriate moment.

"Ha!" she said, delighted with her own success.

"Ha indeed," agreed Froken, a smile breaking. "Co-ordination. All is co-ordination."

"They like Froken, don't they," Lucy said to Henrietta, as the students tidied away the implements of their trade.

"They like all the Staff," Henrietta said, with a faint return of her Head-Girl tone. "It is not advisable to keep a mistress who is unpopular, however good she may be. On the other hand it is desirable that they should be just a little in awe of their preceptors." She smiled in her senior-clergy-making-a-joke manner; Henrietta did not make jokes easily. "In their different ways, Froken, Miss Lux, and Madame Lefevre all inspire a healthy awe."

"Madame Lefevre? If I were a student, I don't think it would be awe that would knock my knees together, but sheer terror."

"Oh, Marie is quite human when you know her. She likes being one of the College legends."

Marie and The Abhorrence, thought Lucy; two College legends. Each with identical qualities; terrible and fascinating.

The students were standing in file, breathing deeply as they raised their arms and lowered them. Their fifty minutes of concentrated activity had come to an end, and there they were: flushed, triumphant, fulfilled.

Henrietta rose to go, and as she turned to follow Lucy found that Froken's mother had been sitting behind them in the gallery. She was a plump little woman with her hair in a bun at the back, and reminded Lucy of Mrs. Noah, as portrayed by the makers of toy Arks. Lucy bowed and smiled that extra-wide-for-foreigners smile that one uses to bridge the gap of silence, and then, remembering that although this little woman spoke no English she might speak German, she tried a phrase, and the little woman's face lit up.

"To speak with you, Fraulein, is such pleasure that I will even speak German to do it," she said. "My daughter tells me that you are very distinguished."

Lucy said that she had had a success, which was not the same thing as being distinguished unfortunately; and expressed her admiration for the work she had just witnessed. Henrietta who had taken Classics instead of Modern Languages at school, washed her hands of this exchange of civilities, and preceded them down the stairs. As Lucy and Fru Gustavsen came out into the sunlight the students were emerging from the door at the other end, running or dawdling across the covered way to the house. Last of the group came Rouse, and Lucy could not help suspecting that her emergence was timed to coincide with the passing of Henrietta. There was no need for her to linger a yard or two behind the others like that; she must see out of the tail of her eye that Henrietta was bearing down on her. In similar circumstances Lucy would have bolted, but Rouse was lingering. She liked Miss Rouse even less than usual.

Henrietta overtook the girl and paused to speak to her; and as Lucy and her companion passed them Lucy saw the expression on the tight freckled face turned up to receive the Principal's words of wisdom, and remembered what they had called that at school. "Being smarmy." And laying it on with a trowel, too, she thought with vulgar satisfaction.

"And I've always liked freckles, too," she said regretfully.

"Bitte?"

But this was not a subject that could be done justice to in German. The Significance of Freckles. She could see it: a thick tome full of portmanteau words and portentousness. No, it would need French to do it justice. Some distilled essence of amiable cynicism. Some pretty little blasting phrase.

"Is this your first visit to England?" she asked; and instead of entering the house with the others they strolled together through the garden towards the front of the house.

Yes, this was Fru Gustavsen's first visit to England, and it amazed her that a people who created gardens like this should also create the buildings in them. "Not this, of course," she said, "this old house is very pleasant. It is of a period that was good, yes? But what one sees from train and taxi; after Sweden it is horrible. Please do not think that I am Russian about things. It is-"

"Russian?"

"Yes. Naive, and ignorant, and sure that no one can do anything as well as my own country can do it. It is just that I am used to modern houses that are good to look at."

Lucy said that she might as well get over the subject of our cooking while she was at it.

"Ach, no," said the little woman surprisingly, "it is not so, that. My daughter has told me. Here in College it is according to regime"-Lucy thought that "according to regime" was tact of the most delicate-"and so is not typical. Nor in the hotels is it typical, my daughter says. But she has stayed in private houses in holiday time, and the dishes of the country, she says, are delicious. Not everything she liked. Not everyone likes our raw herring, after all. But the joint roasted in the oven, and the apple tart with cream, and the cold ham very pink and tender, all that is most admirable. Most admirable."

So, walking through the summer garden Lucy found herself expatiating on herrings fried in oatmeal, and parkins, and Devonshire splits, and hot-pot, and collops, and other regional delicacies. She concealed the existence of the pork pie, which she privately considered a barbarism.

As they turned the corner of the house towards the front door, they passed the windows of a lecture-room where the Seniors were already engaged in listening to Miss Lux. The windows were pushed up from the bottom as far as they would go, so that the room was visible in all its details, and Lucy cast an idle glance at the assembled profiles presented to her.

She had looked away before she realised that these were not the faces she had seen only ten minutes ago. She looked back again, startled. Gone was the excitement, the flush of exercise, the satisfaction of achievement. Gone for the moment was even the youth. The faces were tired and spiritless.

Not all of them, of course. Hasselt still had her air of calm well-being. And Beau Nash's face had still its bright indestructible good looks. But the majority looked sunken; indescribably weary. Mary Innes, seated nearest the window, had a marked line from nostrils to chin; a line that had no business there for thirty years yet.

A little saddened and uncomfortable, as one is at the unexpected discovery of an unhappiness in the middle of delight, Lucy turned her head away, and her last glimpse as she walked past was the face of Miss Rouse. And the expression on the face of Miss Rouse surprised her. It reminded her of Walberswick.

Now why Walberswick?

The wary freckled countenance of Miss Rouse had nothing in common with that formidable grande dame who was Lucy's aunt. Certainly not.

Then why-but stop! It wasn't her aunt; it was her aunt's cat. The expression on that North-Country face in the lecture-room was the expression on the face of Philadelphia when she had had cream instead of milk in her saucer. And there was only one word for that expression. The word smug.

Lucy felt, not unreasonably, that someone who had just failed to perform a routine exercise had no right to be looking smug. And the last faint lingering inclination to be sorry for Miss Rouse died in her.

"Miss Pym," said The Nut Tart, materialising at Lucy's elbow, "let us run away together."

It was Wednesday morning, and College was sunk in the thick silence of Final Examinations. Lucy was leaning over a five-barred gate behind the gymnasium, staring at a field of buttercups. It was here at the end of the Leys garden that the country began; the real country, free of the last tentacles of Larborough, unraped and unlittered. The field sloped to a stream, beyond which was the cricket field; and beyond that into the far distance stretched the unbroken pattern of hedge and tree and pasture; yellow, and white, and green; asleep in the morning sunshine.

Lucy took her eyes with difficulty from the shimmering yellow of the buttercups that had been mesmerising her, and wondered how many flowered silk frocks the Brazilian possessed. Here was yet another one, shaming the English subtleties with its brilliance.

"Where do you propose that we run to?" she asked.

"Let's go to the village."

"Is there a village?"

"There is always a village in England; it is that kind of country. But more especially there is Bidlington. You can see the weather thing of the church steeple just over those trees there."

"It looks a long way," said Lucy, who was no great walker, and was greatly content where she was; it was a long time since she had had a field of buttercups to look at and all time to do it in. "Is it much of a place?"

"Oh yes. It is a two-pub village," Desterro said, as one quoting a calibre. "Besides, it has everything a village in England should have. Queen Elizabeth slept there, and Charles the Second hid there; and Crusaders are buried in the church-there is one just like the manager of our ranch in Brazil-and all the cottages are obtainable on postcards at the shop; and it appears in books, the village does-"

"Guide books, you mean?"

"No, no. It has an author who specialised in it, you understand. I read one of his books when I came first to Leys. *Rain Over The Sky* it was called. All breasts and incest. And it has the Bidlington Martyrs-that is six men who threw stones at the police station last century some time and got put in jail. Imagine a country that remembers a thing like that! In my country they use knives-when they can't afford revolvers-and we smother the corpses with flowers, and cry a lot, and forget all about it next week."

"Well-"

"We can have some coffee at The Teapot."

"A little Hibernian, surely?"

But that was too much for even an intelligent stranger to these shores. "It is *real* coffee, I may tell you. It both smells and tastes. Oh, come on, Miss Pym. It is a small fifteen minutes away, and it is not yet ten o'clock. And there is nothing to do in this place until we are summoned to eat beans at one o'clock."

"Are you not taking any of the examinations?" Lucy asked, passing meekly through the gate that was held open for her.

"Anatomy I shall take, I think. Just, as you say, for the hell of it. I have taken all the lectures, so it will be fun to find out how much I know. It is worth knowing anatomy. It is a great labour, of course; it is a subject in which imagination is not appreciated, but it is worth learning."

"I suppose so. One wouldn't feel a fool in an emergency."

"Emergency?" said Desterro, whose mind had apparently not been running along these lines. "Oh, yes, I see. But what I meant is that it is a subject that does not get out of date. Now *your* subject, if you will forgive me, Miss Pym, is continually getting out of date, no? To listen to it is charming, but to work at it would be very foolish. An idea today may be nonsense tomorrow, but a clavicle is a clavicle for all time. You see?"

Lucy saw, and envied such economy of effort.

"So tomorrow, when the Juniors take their Final Anatomy, I take it too. It is a respect-worthy thing; my grandmother would approve of it. But today they are busy about conundrums, and so me, I walk to Bidlington with the charming Miss Pym and we have coffee."

"Conundrums?"

The Nut Tart fished a folded paper from the minute pocket of her frock and read from it: "If the ball is over the touch line but has not reached the ground and a player standing inside hits or catches the ball and brings it into the court again, what decision would you give?"

In a silence more eloquent than speech she folded up the cyclostyled sheet and put it away again.

"How did you get a copy of their paper if they are still busy on the subject of games?"

"Miss Wragg gave me one. She said it might amuse me. It does."

Down between the yellow field and the may-white hedge the path led them to the stream. They paused by the small bridge to stare at the shadowed water under the willows.

"Over there," Desterro said, pointing at the level ground across the stream, "is the games field. In winter it is deep in mud, and they have bars across their shoes to keep them from slipping in it." Lucy thought that if she were saying: "They wear rings through their noses to add to their attraction" the tone would be identical. "Now we walk down-stream to the next little bridge and get on to the road there. It is not a road; just a lane." She moved in silence down the shaded path, a bright dragon-fly of a creature, graceful and alien; and Lucy was surprised to find that she was capable of so unbroken a quiet.

As they came up on to the road at last she said: "Have you any money, Miss Pym?"

"No," said Lucy, stopping in dismay.

"Neither have I. But it is all right. Miss Nevill will finance us."

"Who is Miss Nevill?"

"The lady who runs the tea-house."

"That is rather unusual, isn't it?"

"Not with me. I am always forgetting my money. But Miss Nevill is charming. Do not feel bad about it, dear Miss Pym, I am in good standing in the village, you will see."

The village was all the Desterro had claimed for it; and so was Miss Nevill. So indeed, was The Teapot. It was one of those teashops so much despised by the bread-and-cheese-and-beer school, and so gladly welcomed by a generation of tea-drinkers who remember the fly-blown rooms behind village bakers' shops, the primitive buns with currants like dead insects, the cracked and ill-washed cups, and the black evil tea.

It had all the properties stigmatised by the literary frequenters of village inns: the Indian-tree-pattern china, the dark oak tables, the linen curtains in a Jacobean design, the herbaceous bouquets in unglazed brown jugs; yes, even the arts and crafts in the window. But to Lucy, who in the Alan period had had her share of undusted "snugs," it was quite frankly charming. There was a rich scent of spiced cakes straight from the oven; there was, as well as the long window on the street, a further window that gave on a garden bright with colour; there was peace, and coolness, and welcome.

Miss Nevill, a large lady in a chintz apron, received Desterro as an old and valued acquaintance, and asked if she were "playing hookey, as you say on your side of the Atlantic." The Nut Tart ignored this identification with the back streets of Brooklyn. "This is Miss Pym who writes books about psychology and is our guest at Leys," she said, politely introducing Lucy. "I have told her that here one can drink real coffee, and be in general civilised. We have no money at all, either of us, but we will have a great deal to eat and pay you back later."

This appeared to Miss Nevill to be quite a normal proposition, and she went away to the kitchen to get the coffee with neither surprise nor demur. The place was empty at this hour of the morning, and Lucy wandered round inspecting the old prints and the new crafts-she was pleased to observe that Miss Nevill drew the line at Brummagem brass door-knockers even if there were raffia mats-and then sat down with Desterro at the table looking on to the village street. Before their coffee arrived, they were joined by a middle-aged couple, husband and wife, who drove up in a car as if they were searching for the place. The car was the kind that a provincial doctor might use; low in petrol consumption and in its third or fourth year of wear. But the woman who came round from the further seat with a laughing remark to her husband was not a typical doctor's wife. She was grey, and slim, with long legs and narrow feet in good shoes. Lucy watched her with pleasure. It was not often nowadays that one saw good bones; smartness had taken the place of breeding.

"In *my* country," said Desterro, looking with a considering eye at the woman and with a contemptuous eye on the car, "that woman would have a chauffeur *and a footman*."

It was not often, moreover, that one saw a middle-aged husband and wife so pleased with each other, Lucy thought, as she watched them come in. They had a holiday air. They came in and looked about them expectantly, questioningly.

"Yes, this is it," the woman said. "That is the window on the garden that she talks about, and there is the print of Old London Bridge."

They moved about looking at things, quietly, unselfconsciously, and then took the table at the other window. Lucy was relieved to see that the man was the mate she would have chosen for such a woman; a little saturnine, perhaps, more self-absorbed than the woman; but quite admirable. He reminded her of someone, but she could not think of whom; someone whom she admired. The eyebrows, it was. Dark level brush-marks low over the eyes. His suit was very old, she noticed; well-pressed and kept, but with that much-cleaned air that overtakes a garment in its old age. The woman's suit, a tweed, was frankly shabby, and her stockings were darned-very neatly darned-at the heels. Her hands, too, looked as if they were accustomed to household tasks, and her fine grey hair was washed at home and unwaved. What had she got to look so happy about, this woman who struggled with straitened means? Was it just being on holiday with a husband she loved? Was it that that gave her grey luminous eyes their almost childlike happiness?

Miss Nevill came in with the coffee and a large plate of spiced cakes shining with newness and crisp at the edges. Lucy decided to forget her weight just this once and enjoy herself. This was a decision she made with deplorable frequency.

As she poured the coffee she heard the man say: "Good morning. We have come all the way from the West Country to taste your griddle cakes. Do you think you could make us some, or are you too busy at this hour of the morning?"

"If you are too busy it doesn't matter," said the woman with the hard-worked hands. "We shall have some of the cakes that smell so good."

But Miss Nevill would not be a minute in preparing the griddle cakes. She had no batter standing, she said, so the griddle cakes would not be as wonderful as when the batter was allowed to stand; but she was not often asked for them in summer time.

"No, I expect not. But our daughter at Leys has talked so often of them, and this may be our only chance of tasting them." The woman smiled, half it seemed at the thought of her daughter, half at their own childish desire.

So they were College parents.

Whose? Lucy wondered, watching them over the rim of her coffee cup.

Beau's, perhaps. Oh, no; Beau was rich, of course. Then whose?

She wouldn't mind giving them to Dakers, but there were objections. That tow-head could not be sired by that dark grave man; nor could that adult and intelligent woman have given birth to the through-other piece of nonsense that was Dakers.

And then, quite suddenly, she knew whose eyebrows those were.

Mary Innes's.

They were Mary Innes's parents. And in some odd way they explained Mary Innes. Her gravity; her air of belonging to a century other than this one; her not finding life very amusing. To have standards to live up to, but to have little money to live up to them with, was not a happy combination for a girl burdened with the need to make a success of her training.

Into the silence that had succeeded Miss Nevill's departure, Lucy heard her own voice saying: "Forgive me, but is your name Innes?"

They turned to her, puzzled for a moment; then the woman smiled. "Yes," she said. "Have we met somewhere?"

"No," said poor Lucy, growing a little pink as she always did when her impulsiveness had led her into an unexpected situation. "But I recognised your husband's eyebrows."

"My eyebrows," said Mr Innes.

But his wife, quicker-witted, laughed. "Of course," she said. "Mary! Are you from Leys, then? Do you know Mary?" Her face lit and her voice sang as she said it. Do you know Mary? Was it because she was going to see her daughter that she was happy today?

Lucy explained who she was, and introduced Desterro, who was pleased to find that this charming couple knew all about her. "There is very little we don't know about Leys," Mrs Innes said, "even if we have never seen the place."

"Not seen it? Won't you come over and have your coffee with us, by the way?"

"It was too far for us to inspect it before Mary went there. So we decided that we would wait until her training was finished and then come to the Demonstration." Lucy deduced that if fares had not been a problem, Mary Innes's mother would not have had to wait these years before seeing Leys; she would have come if only so that she could picture her daughter in her setting.

"But you are going there now, surely?"

"No. Oddly enough, we are not. We are on our way to Larborough, where my husband-he's a doctor-has to attend a meeting. We could go to Leys, of course, but it is the week of the Final Examinations, and it would only distract Mary to have her parents descending suddenly on her for no reason. It is a little difficult to pass by when we are so near, but we have waited so long that we can wait another ten days or so. What we couldn't resist was turning off the main West road as far as Bidlington. We didn't expect to run into any College people at this hour of the morning, especially in Examination week, and we did want to see the place that Mary had talked so much about."

"We knew that we shouldn't have time on Demonstration Day," Dr Innes said. "There will be so much to see then. A surprisingly varied training, isn't it?"

Lucy agreed, and described her first impression of the staff-room with its varying worlds.

"Yes. We were a little puzzled when Mary chose that for her career-she had never shown any great interest in games, and I had thoughts that she might take a medical training-but she said she wanted a career with a great many facets; and she seems to have found it!"

Lucy remembered the concentration of purpose in those level brows; she had been right in her face-reading; if Mary Innes had an ambition it would not lightly be given up. Really, eyebrows were the most *helpful* things. If psychology ever went out of fashion she would write a book about face-reading. Under another name, of course. Face-reading was not well seen among the intelligentsia.

"She is very beautiful, your daughter," said Desterro unexpectedly. She polished off a large mouthful of spice cake, and then, feeling the surprise in their silence, looked up at them. "Is it not a proper thing in England to compliment parents on their daughter's looks?"

"Oh, yes," Mrs Innes said hastily, "it is not that, it is just that we had not thought of Mary as beautiful. She is nice to look at, of course; at least we think so, but then parents are apt to be fatuous about an only daughter. She-"

"When I came first to this place," Desterro said, reaching out for another cake from the plate (how *did* she keep that figure!), "it was raining, and all the dirty leaves were hanging down from the trees like dead bats and dripping on everyone, and everyone was rushing round College and saying: 'Oh *darling*, how *are* you? Did you have nice hols? Darling, you won't believe it but I left my new hockey stick on *Crewe platform*! And then I saw a girl who was *not* running about and *not* talking, and who looked a little like my great-grandmother's grandmother who is in the dining-room at the house of my grandmother's great-nephew, so I said: 'It is not after all a barbarism. If it were as it seems to be that girl would not be here. I shall stay. Is there more coffee, Miss Pym, please? She is not only beautiful, your daughter, she is the only beautiful person at Leys."

"What about Beau Nash?" asked Lucy loyally.

"In England at Christmas time-*very* little milk, Miss Pym, please-the magazines go all gay and give away bright pretty pictures that one can frame and hang above the kitchen mantel-piece to make glad the hearts of the cook and her friends. Very shiny, they are, with-

"Now that," said Mrs Innes, "is sheer libel! Beau is lovely, quite lovely, and you know it. I forgot that you would know Beau, too," she turned to Lucy, "that you would know them all, in fact. Beau is the only one we know because she came to us for the holidays once; at Easter time when the West is kinder than the rest of England; and Mary went to them once for some weeks in the summer. We admired Beau so much." She looked to her husband for confirmation; he had been too withdrawn.

Dr Innes roused himself-he had the wrung-out look of the overworked G.P. when he sank into repose-and the saturnine face took on a boyish and faintly malicious, if tender, amusement. "It was very odd to see our competent and self-reliant Mary being looked after," he said

Mrs Innes evidently felt that this was not the contribution she had been looking for, but decided to make the best of it. "Perhaps," she said, as if thinking of it for the first time, "we have always taken Mary's self-reliance so much for granted that she finds it pleasant to be looked after." And to Miss Pym: "It is because they are complementary, I think, that they are such great friends. I am glad about it because we like Beau so much, and because Mary has never made intimate friends easily."

"It is a very strenuous training, isn't it?" Dr Innes said. "I sometimes look at my daughter's notebooks and wonder why they bother with stuff that even a doctor forgets as soon as he leaves medical school."

"The cross-section of the villi," remembered Lucy.

"Yes; that sort of thing. You seem to have picked up a remarkable amount of physical lore in four days."

The crumpets came, and even without the ritual standing of the batter they were worth coming even from the West Country for, supposing that had been true. It was a happy party. Indeed, Lucy felt that the whole room was soaked in happiness; that happiness bathed it like a reflexion from the sunlight outside. Even the doctor's tired face looked content and relaxed. As for Mrs Innes, Lucy had rarely seen such happiness on the face of a woman; merely being in this room that her daughter had used so often was, it seemed, a sort of communion with her, and in a few days' time she would see her in the flesh and share her achievement.

If I had gone back to London, Lucy thought, I would have had no share in this. What would I be doing? Eleven o'clock. Going for a walk in the Park, and deciding how to get out of being guest of honour at some literary dinner. Instead I have this. And all because Dr Knight wanted to go to a medical conference tomorrow. No, because once long ago Henrietta stood up for me at school. It was odd to think that this sun-lit movement in an English June began to take shape thirty years ago in a dark crowded school cloakroom filled with little girls putting on their goloshes. What were first causes, anyhow?

"This has been *very* pleasant," said Mrs Innes, as they stood once more in the village street. "And it is nice to think that we shall meet again so soon. You will still be at Leys when the Demonstration comes off, won't you?"

"I hope so," Lucy said, and wondered if she could cadge a bed from Henrietta for so long.

"And you have both promised, solemnly and on your word of honour, not to tell anyone that you saw us today," Dr Innes said.

"We have," they said, waiting to see their new friends get into their car.

"Do you think I can turn the car in one swoop without hitting the Post Office?" Dr Innes said, consideringly.

"I should hate to make any more Bidlington martyrs," his wife said. "A tiresome breed. On the other hand, what is this life without some risk?"

So Dr Innes encouraged his engine and swung into this risky evolution. The hub of his off front wheel left a faint smudge on the Post Office's virgin white-wash.

"Gervase Innes, his mark," said Mrs Innes, and waved her hand to them. "Till Demonstration Day, and pray for fine weather for it! Au revoir!"

They watched the car grow small up the village street, and turned towards the field path and Leys.

"Nice people," Desterro said.

"Charming. Odd to think that we should never have met them if you had not had a craving for good coffee this morning."

"That is the kind of English, let me tell you in confidence, Miss Pym, that make every other nation on earth sick with envy. So quiet, so well-bred, so good to look at. They are poor, too, did you notice? Her blouse is quite washed-out. It used to be blue, the blouse; you could see when she leaned forward and her collar lifted a little. It is wrong that they should be so poor, people like that."

"It must have cost her a lot not to see her daughter when she was so near," Lucy said reflectively.

"Ah, but she has character, that woman. She was right not to come. None of the Seniors has one little particle of interest to spare this week. Take away even one little particle, and *woops*! the whole thing comes crashing down." She plucked an ox-eyed daisy from the bank by the bridge and gave the first giggle Lucy had ever heard from her. "I wonder how my colleagues are getting on with their one-leg-over-the-line puzzles."

Lucy was wondering how she herself would appear in Mary Innes's Sunday letter home. "It will be amusing," Mrs Innes had said, "to get back home and read all about you in Mary's Sunday letter. Something to do with relativity. Like coming back the previous night."

"It was strange that Mary Innes should have reminded you of someone in a portrait," she said to Desterro. "That is how she seemed to me, too."

"Ah yes, my great-grandmother's grandmother." Desterro dropped the daisy on to the surface of the water and watched the stream bear it down under the bridge and away out of sight. "I did not say it to the nice Inneses, but my great-grandmother's grandmother was a little unpopular with her generation."

"Oh? Shy, perhaps. What we call nowadays an inferiority complex."

"I would not know about that. Her husband died too conveniently. It is always sad for a woman when her husband dies too conveniently."

"You mean that she murdered him!" Lucy said, standing stock-still in the summer landscape, appalled.

"Oh, no. There was no *scandal*." Desterro sounded reproving. "It was just that her husband died too conveniently. He drank too much, and was a great gambler, and *not* very attractive. And there was a loose tread at the top of the stairs. A long flight of stairs. And he stepped on it one day when he was drunk. That was all."

"And did she marry again?" Lucy asked, having absorbed this information.

"Oh, no. She was not in love with anyone else. She had her son to bring up, and the estates were safe for him now that there was no one to gamble them away. She was a very good estate manager. That is where my grandmother got her talent from. When my grandmother came out from England to marry my grandfather she had never been further from her own county than Charles Street, West One; and in six months she was running the estate." Desterro sighed with admiration. "They are wonderful, the English."

Miss Pym was invigilating at the Senior Pathology Final, so as to give Miss Lux more time for the correction and marking of previous papers, when Henrietta's meek little secretary tiptoed in and laid the day's letters reverently on the desk in front of her. Miss Pym had been frowning over a copy of the examination paper, and thinking how badly words like *arthritis gonorrhoica* and *suppurative teno-synovitis* went with the clean air of a summer morning after breakfast. *Emphysema* was not so bad; it might be the gardener's name for a flower. A sort of columbine. And *kyphosis* she could picture as something in the dahlia line. *Myelitis* would be a small creeping plant, very blue, with a tendency to turn pink if not watched. And *tabes dorsalis* was obviously an exotic affair of the tiger lily persuasion, expensive and very faintly obscene.

Chorea. Sclerosis. Pes Varus.

Dear goodness. Did those young things know all that? Differentiate the treatment of something-or-other according to whether it is (a) congenital (b) traumatic (c) hysterical. Well, well. How had she ever erred so far as to feel patronising about these young creatures?

She looked down from her dais with affection on them; all writing away for dear life. The faces were sober but not on the whole anxious. Only Rouse looked worried, and Lucy decided that her face looked better worried than smug, and withheld her sympathy. Dakers was ploughing steadily over the paper with her tongue protruding and an automatic sigh as she came to the end of each line and began a new one. Beau was confident and detached as if she were writing invitations; doubt was something that had never entered her life; neither her present standing nor her future life was in jeopardy. Stewart's face under the bright red hair was pale, but a faint smile played round her mouth; Stewart's future, too, was assured; she was going to the Cordwainers School, going home to Scotland bringing her sheaves with her, and Lucy was going to the party she was giving in her room on Saturday night to celebrate. ("We don't ask Staff to individual parties, but since you are not quite Staff you could rank as just a friend.") The Four Disciples, spread across the front row, cast each other communal and encouraging glances now and then; this was their own particular subject and obviously what they did not know about it was not worth mentioning; Manchester was going to get its money's worth. Innes, by the window, lifted her head every now and then to look out at the garden, as if seeking refreshment; that it was not inspiration she sought was apparent from her unhurried progress through the questions; she turned to the garden for some spiritual comfort; it was as if she said: "Ah yes, you are still there, Beauty; there is a world outside this lecture-room." Innes was beginning to look as if College might be too much with her. That tired line from nostril to mouth was still there.

Lucy picked up the paper-knife from Miss Lux's neat desk, and considered her post. Three bills, which she need not disturb the holy hush by opening. A receipt. An Annual Report. A large, square, deep-blue, and very stiff and expensive envelope with MILLICENT CRAYE embossed in scarlet across the flap (really there was no end to the self-advertising instinct in actresses) which would be five lines of thanks with a broad nib and out-size capitals for her contribution to the Benevolent Fund. That left only Mrs Montmorency. So into Mrs Montmorency she inserted the paper-knife.

Maddam (wrote Mrs Montmorency),

I as done as you sed an sent the urgent by passel post. Registered. Fred put it into Wigmore Street on is way to work receit enclosed I as packed the blue and the blouses also underclose as per instruxions your pink nitie not having come back from the laundry I as put in the bedge instead hopping this will be all rite.

Maddam, please dont think that I presoom but this is a good thing. It is no life for a woman writin books and not havin no young company please dont think I presoom but I as your welfare at heart you ben one of the nicest ladies I ever worked for Fred says the same. A nice lady like that he says when look at the things thats around not write it isnt please dont think I presoom

yrs respectfully

Mrs Montmorency.

P.S. Wire brush in toe of swede shoe

Lucy spent the next fifteen minutes being touched by Mrs Montmorency's concern for her, being furious with the laundry, and wondering why she paid education rates. It wasn't public schools for everyone that was needed but a great many elementary school classes of not more than a dozen, where the future Mrs Montmorencys could be adequately taken care of in the matter of the Three Rs. Old McLean, their jobbing gardener at home, had left school when he was twelve, but he could write as good a letter as any University acquaintance of hers; and why? Because he came from a small village school with small classes and a good schoolmaster.

And of course because he lived in an age when the Three Rs were more important than Free Milk. They made him literate and left the rest to him. He lived on white-flour scones and stewed tea and died hale and hearty at the age of ninety-two.

She was roused from her musings by Miss Rouse. There was a new expression on Miss Rouse's face, and Lucy didn't like the new expression at all. She had seen Miss Rouse look despairing, smarmy, smug, and worried, but till now she had never seen her look furtive.

Why should she be looking furtive?

She watched her for a moment or two, curiously.

Rouse looked up and caught her gaze and looked quickly away again. Her furtive expression had gone; what had taken its place was one labelled Consciously Carefree. Lucy knew all about that expression. She had not been Form Mistress of the Lower Fourth for nothing. Every eater of illicit sweets wore that expression. So did those who were doing their arithmetic in French lesson.

So did those who were cheating at an examination.

What was it Henrietta had said? "She finds written work difficult."

So.

Emphysema and all those flowery sounding things were too much for Miss Rouse, and so she had provided some aids to memory. The question was what kind of aids and where were they? Not on her knee. The desks were open in front, so that a lap was no safe billet for a crib. And one could hardly write enough pathology on one's finger-nails to be of much help; fingernails were useful only for formula. The obvious solution would be the notes up the sleeve, with or without an arrangement of elastic, but these girls had no sleeves below the elbow. Then, what? Where? Or was it that she was just having glimpses of O'Donnell's paper in front of her? Or Thomas's to her right?

Lucy went back to her letters for a moment or two, and waited. All schoolmistresses know this gambit. She looked up casually at the Seniors in general and again went back to her letters. When next she looked up it was straight at Rouse. Rouse's head was low over her paper and in her left hand she held a handkerchief. Now even on a handkerchief it is not possible to write anything that is helpful on so large a subject as pathology, nor is it an easy affair to manipulate; on the other hand handkerchiefs were not common objects at Leys, and certainly no one else was clutching one and dabbing a nose occasionally with it. Lucy decided that whatever sources of information Rouse had lay in her left hand. Her desk was at the back on the window side, so that the wall was to her left; whatever she did with her left hand was not overlooked by anyone.

Well, thought Lucy, what does A do?

Walk down the room and demand the handkerchief and find that it is a square piece of white linen, nine inches by nine inches, with the owner's initials properly marked in one corner, and as candid as a good laundry can make it?

Demand the handkerchief and unearth a scandal that will blast the Senior set like a hurricane at their least stable moment?

See that Rouse gets no chance to use her source of information, and say nothing?

The last was certainly the most sensible. She couldn't have obtained very much aid from anything so far; it would be doing no injustice to anyone to make her a present of that small amount.

Lucy left the desk and strolled down the room to the back, where she stood leaning against the wall, Thomas to her right and Rouse to her left. Thomas stopped writing for a moment and looked up at her with a quick smile. But Rouse did not look up. And Lucy watched the hot blood dye her sandy neck a dull red. And presently she put away the handkerchief-and whatever else that hand contained-in her tunic pocket.

Well, she had foiled the machinations of the evil-intended, but she could feel no satisfaction about it. For the first time it occurred to her that what was very naughty and deplorable in the Fourth Form was quite sickening in a Senior Final. She was glad that it was Rouse and not anyone else. Presently she strolled back to her desk on the dais, and as far as she could see Rouse made no further effort to obtain help with her paper. On the contrary, she was very obviously in deep waters. And Lucy was infuriated to find herself feeling sorry for her. Yes, *sorry*. Sorry for *Rouse*. After all, the girl had worked. Worked like a madman, if all reports were true. It was not as if she had been taking an easy way out to save herself effort. It was just that she found acquiring theoretical knowledge difficult almost to the point of impossibility, and had succumbed to temptation in her desperation.

This point of view made Lucy feel much better about it, and she spent the rest of her invigilating time speculating quite undistressedly about the nature of the crib. She would look again at the examination paper, and consider the enormous range of material it covered, and wonder how Rouse had devised anything at once helpful and invisible. She longed to ask her.

The most likely explanation was that there were two or three particular subjects that Rouse was afraid of, and that help with them was scribbled on a piece of paper.

Innes was the first to shuffle the written sheets together and slip the waiting clip over their upper edge. She read through the pages, making a correction now and then, laid the sheaf down on her desk, sat for a few relaxed moments taking in the beauty of the garden, and then rose quietly and came forward to leave her work on the desk in front of Miss Pym.

"Oh, catastrophe!" wailed Dakers; "is somebody finished? And I have a whole question and a half to do yet!"

"Hush, Miss Dakers," said Lucy, as in duty bound.

Dakers favoured her with a radiant smile, and went back to her steady plodding.

Stewart and Beau Nash followed Innes very shortly; and presently the pile of papers in front of Miss Pym began to grow. With five minutes of the allotted time still to go there were only three students left in the examination room: the little dark Welsh Thomas, who presumably slept too much to be a good «study»; the imperturbable Dakers still plodding steadily; and a flushed and unhappy Rouse, who was plainly making heavy weather of it. With two minutes still to go there was only Rouse; she was looking confused and desperate; making hasty little excursions back and fore through her papers, deleting, amending, and adding.

The distant yelling of the bell put an end to her indecisions and to her chances; whatever she had done must now abide. She shoved her papers hastily together, aware that the bell meant an instant appearance in the gymnasium and that Froken would not consider the ordeal of an examination paper any excuse for being late, and brought them up to Lucy at the double. Lucy had expected her to avoid her eye, or otherwise to display symptoms of awkwardness or selfconsciousness. But Rouse surprised her by a frank smile and a still franker remark.

"Whoo!" said Rouse, blowing her breath out expressively, "that was a horror." And she ran out to join the rest of her set.

Lucy opened the much-scored offering and looked at it with compunction. She had been imagining things. Rouse had not been cheating after all. Or at least not systematically. That furtive look might have been the guilt of inadequacy, now she came to think of it; or perhaps, at the worst, a hope of hints from her neighbour's paper. And that flush that had dyed her neck was due to her awareness of being suspected; Lucy could remember very well even yet times at school when the very knowledge that her innocent act was capable of sinister interpretation was enough to make her face burn with false guilt. Really, she owed Rouse an apology. She would find some way of making it up to her.

She stacked the papers neatly together, put them in alphabetical order from sheer force of habit, checked their number, and carried them upstairs to Miss Lux's room, glad that it would not be her chore to correct them. There was no one in the room, so she left them on the desk and stood for a moment wondering what to do with the hour before lunch. She toyed with the thought of watching the gymnastics, but decided that she must not allow the performance to become familiar, and consequently devoid of wonder, before

Demonstration Day. Having induced Henrietta to keep her until then-Henrietta had not required much inducement, it is true-she was not going to mar her own pleasure in the day by too many tastings beforehand. She went downstairs again, lingering by the tall window on the landing-how well eighteenth-century architects had understood how to build houses; nowadays landings were not things to linger on, but breakneck little corners lit, if at all, by a small circular light like a ship's port-hole-and from there, beyond the courtyard and the opposite wing she could see the elms of the field that led to the stream. She would go and look at the buttercups for a little. There was no better way of wasting a summer hour than staring at a field of buttercups. So down she went, and along the wing, and so out to the covered path to the gymnasium, for beyond the gymnasium were the buttercups.

As she went down the covered way her eye caught a spot of colour in the grass that bordered the path. At first she took it for a flower petal and was going to ignore it, when she noticed that it was square, and certainly not a petal. She turned back and picked it up. It was a tiny address-book in faded red leather. It looked as if it had formed part of the fittings of a handbag; an old-fashioned handbag probably since one did not see leather nor workmanship like that nowadays. Idly, with her thoughts on the femininity of that vanished bag with its miniature fittings-there would of course have been a little tube of scent, and a gold pencil, and one of those ivory tablets to scribble engagements on-she opened it, and read, on a page crowded with writing in a tiny script: "Path. anat. changes as in traumatic. Fibrin in synov. memb. Tissues contr. by fibr. and folds of caps. joined to bone. Anchylosis. Fever."

It meant nothing to Lucy as information but its meaning was obvious. She turned the pages, finding nearly all of them crowded with the same succinct information. Even the X page-devoted by the keepers of address-books to measurements for new curtains or that good story that would do for the W.R.I. speech next Tuesday- even the X page had cryptic remarks about rays. What bowled Lucy over was the comprehensiveness of it; the premeditation. This was no product of a last-minute panic; it was a cold-blooded insurance against failure. By the neatness and method shown in the compiling, it looked as though the entries had been made as each subject was studied. Had the notebook been of a normal size, in fact, it would have been nothing more than a legitimate precis of a subject. But no one making a precis would have chosen a book not much larger than a good-sized postage stamp when an equally portable but normal-sized notebook could be had for a few pence. The use of a book so tiny that a mapping pen had been necessary in order to make the entries legible could have only one explanation.

Lucy knew very well what had happened. Rouse had pulled out her handkerchief as she ran. She had never before carried the little book in a pocket, and her mind was divided urgently between the bad paper she had done and the fear of being late for gymnastics, so there was no care in the pulling out of the handkerchief. And so the little book dropped on to the grass at the edge of the path.

She walked on beyond the gymnasium and through the five-barred gate into the field, but she had no eye for the buttercups. She walked on slowly down the field to the coolness under the willows and the quiet green water. She hung over the rail of the bridge watching the weeds trail and the occasional fish dart, and thought about Rouse. There was no name on the fly-leaf, nor as far as she could see any means of identification in the book itself. Most schools taught script as well as current form in writing nowadays; and script was much less easily recognisable than current writing. A handwriting expert would no doubt be easily able to trace the author, but to what end? There was no evidence that the book had been used for any illegitimate purpose; no evidence even that it had been compiled with any sinister intent-although the presumption was strong. If she handed it over to Henrietta as lost property what would happen? No one would claim it, and Henrietta would be faced with the fact that one of her Seniors had prepared a precis that could be conveniently palmed at an examination.

If nothing was ever said about the book, then Rouse's punishment would be a perpetual and life-long doubt as to what had become of it. Lucy felt that such a punishment fitted the crime admirably. She thumbed the tiny India-paper pages once more, wondered again what Edwardian elegancy had given it birth, and, leaning over, dropped it into the water.

As she walked back to the house she wondered how Rouse had managed the other Final Examinations. Pathology could be no less easy to memorise than Kinesiology or any of the other obscurities studied by the budding P.T.I. How had Rouse, the difficult "study," managed with these? Was the little red leather book only one of five or six? Did one invest in a mapping pen for one subject only? One could, she supposed, buy very tiny address books if one searched long enough; though not perhaps so fine or so tiny as the little red one. It may have been the possession of the little red one which first put the thought of insurance against failure into Rouse's mind.

She remembered that the result of the previous examinations would be exhibited on the letter-board by the students' entrance, so instead of walking round to the front of the house as she had meant to she turned in at the quadrangle door. There were several Junior lists pinned to the green baize, and three Senior lists. Lucy read them with interest.

Eileen O'Donnell
and the rest, below that mark, mere Passes. Well, Rouse had scraped into a First by two marks, it seemed. Lucy turned to the next list.
FINAL MEDICALS First Class
Pauline Lucas
Jenny Burton
and the rest mere Passes. And again Rouse managed to scrape a First.
FINAL KINESIOLOGY Honours
Mary Innes96 First Class
Pauline Lucas 89 Pamela Nash 88 Sheena Stewart 87 Wilhelmina Hasselt 85 Ruth Waymark 80 Janet Gage 79 Joan Dakers 78

Another First! Three Firsts out of three tries. The girl who found written work so difficult? There was surely a strong case for the existence of more little notebooks?

Oh, well; this being Friday, tomorrow would see the end of examinations, and it was not likely that Rouse would, after this morning's experience, bring any extraneous help to the test tomorrow morning. The little book prepared for tomorrow, if it existed, would be still-born.

While she mused over the lists (it was nice to see that Dakers had managed at least one First) Miss Lux arrived with the results of yesterday's Final.

"Thank you for bringing up the Path. papers," she said. "And thank you for invigilating. It helped me to get these done." She thumbed the drawing-pin into the board and stood back to look at the list.

FINAL HYGIENE

Honours

Barbara Rouse...... 78

Barbara Rouse...... 81

"Barbara Rouse, eighty-one," Lucy said, before she thought.

"Yes, surprising, isn't it?" Miss Lux said placidly. "But she works like a black. She is so brilliant in her physical work that I think it maddens her to be far down any list."

"Innes seems to make a habit of heading the lists."

"Oh, Innes is wasted here."

"Why? The more intelligence one brings to a profession the better surely?"

"Yes, but with an intelligence like Innes's one could head much more thrilling lists than these. It's a waste."

"I somehow don't think that Rouse will get eighty-one for today's paper," Lucy said, as they moved away from the board.

"Why? Was she in difficulties?"

"Bogged down," said Lucy; and hoped that she did not sound too pleased. "What a life it is," she added, as the five-minute bell rang, and the dripping Seniors came running in from the gymnasium, ripping off their tunics as they tore into the bathrooms for a shower before the gong went. "When you think of the leisurely way we acquired knowledge. At university, I mean. If we sat a final examination, the rest of the day would almost certainly be our own to recover in. But these young creatures do it as part of their timetable."

From the bathrooms came cursing and chaos. "Oh, Donnie, you *swine*, that was *my* shower!" "Mark, you brute, get off my foot!" "Oh, no, you don't, my girl; these are *my* tights!" "God, look at my blisters!" "Kick over my shoe, Greengage, the floor's sopping." "*Must* you shoot the cold water round like that, you chump!"

"They like it, you know," Lux said. "In their heart they like the rush and the overwork. It makes them feel important. Very few of them will ever have any legitimate reason for feeling important, and so it is comforting for them to have the image of it at least."

"Cynic," said Lucy.

"No, psychologist." She inclined her head towards the row as they moved away. "It sounds like a free fight, doesn't it? Everyone sounds desperate and furious. But it is all play-acting. In five minutes they will be sitting like good children in the dining-room with not a hair out of place."

And so they were. When the Staff filed in to the top table five minutes later, there were the scramblers of the bathroom, standing dutifully behind their chairs, calm, and combed, and neat, their interest already absorbed by the thought of food. Truly, they were children. Whatever heartbreaks they suffered would be forgotten in tomorrow's toy. It was absurd to think of them as harassed adults, trembling on the precipice edge of break-down. They were volatile children; their griefs were loud, and vocal, and transient. For five days now, ever since The Nut Tart had been so knowing under the cedar tree last Saturday afternoon, she had looked for some hint of abnormality, of aberration, of lack of control, and what had she found? One very normal and highly controlled piece of dishonesty; unremarkable except for its neatness.

"Isn't it nice," Henrietta said, helping out something that looked like cheese-and-vegetable pie, "I've got a post in Wales for little Miss Thomas. Near Aberystwyth. I am so delighted."

"A very soporific atmosphere, Wales," Madame Lefevre said, consideringly; blasting Henrietta's whole conception with five gentle words.

"Yes," said Miss Lux, "who is going to keep her awake?"

"It's not who is going to *keep* her awake, it's who is going to wake her in the first place," Wragg said, with a greedy eye on the pie. Wragg was still near enough her College days to be possessed of a large hunger and no gastronomic judgment.

"Wales is her native atmosphere," Henrietta said, repressive, "and I have no doubt she will know how to deal with it. In any case she is not likely to have any great success *outside* Wales; the Welsh are extraordinarily provincial, using the word in its literal sense. I have noticed before how they gravitate back to their own province. It is as well for them to go there in the first place if the chance offers. And luckily, in this case, it has offered very conveniently. The junior gymnast of three. That will suit Miss Thomas very nicely. She has no great initiative, I'm afraid."

"Is Thomas's the only new post?" Wragg asked, falling on the pie.

"No, there was one that I wanted to discuss with you."

Aha, thought Lucy, here comes Arlinghurst at last.

"Ling Abbey wants someone to be wholly responsible for the younger children, and to take dancing as well all through the school. That is to say, the dancing would have to be of a high standard. I wanted to give the post to Miss Dakers-she is very good with small children-but I wanted to know what you thought of her dancing, Marie."

"She is a cow," said Madame.

"She is very good with little ones, though," Wragg said.

"A heavy cow," said Madame.

"It isn't her personal performance that is important," Henrietta said. "It is her power to inspire performance in others. Does she understand the subject sufficiently, that is the point?"

"Oh, she knows the difference between three-four time and four-four, certainly."

"I saw Dakers teaching the babies at West Larborough their dances for their do last Christmas," Wragg said, "and she was wonderful. I was there to crit. her, and I was so fascinated I forgot to make any notes at all. I think she would be just right for that post."

"Well, Marie."

"I can't imagine why anyone bothers," Madame said. "The dancing at Ling Abbey is quite frightful anyhow."

This Pilatian washing of hands, in spite of its negative quality, seemed positive enough to all concerned. It was apparent that Dakers was going to Ling Abbey. And since Ling Abbey was a good place to be going to-if one had to be going to a school-Lucy was glad for her. She glanced down the room to where, even above this babel, Dakers' high voice could be heard italicising her opinion of

the Pathology paper. "I said that a joint went gummy, my dear, and I'm certain that's not the technical word."

"Shall I warn them both, Miss Hodge?" Wragg asked, later.

(Warn?)

"No, just Miss Thomas today, I think. I shall tell Miss Dakers tomorrow. It is better to spread the excitement out."

As the Staff rose from their table and filed out, Wragg turned to the politely standing and temporarily silent students and said: "Miss Hodge will see Miss Thomas in her office when luncheon is over."

This was apparently a ritual pronouncement, for the buzz broke out almost before the Staff had reached the door. "A post, Tommy!" "Congrats, Tommy." "Hoorah, old Thomas." "Up the Welsh!" "Hope it's a thousand a year, Tom." "Iss nott thatt the lucky thing, now!" "Cheers, Tommy!"

And still no one had mentioned Arlinghurst.

When Lucy first heard Arlinghurst mentioned it was not by any of the Staff but by the students themselves. She had spent Saturday afternoon with Froken and her mother, helping to finish the Swedish folk costumes which the Juniors would wear for some of the country dances at the Demonstration. It was a lovely day and they had taken the piles of bright primitive colour to the furthest corner of the garden, where they could sit and look over the English countryside. Both cricket and tennis matches were «away» this week, so the garden was deserted, and no toiling figures marred the virgin green of the field beyond the stream. They had sewed in great beatitude, and Fru Gustavsen seemed to have reported well of Lucy to her daughter, for Froken's reticence had largely vanished, and Lucy was delighted to find that a young woman who had always reminded her of sunlight on snow was the possessor of a rich warm chuckle and a sense of humour to match. (It is true that Lucy's sewing considerably shook Fru Gustavsen's faith in her, but much must be forgiven the English.) Fru Gustavsen had gone back to the subject of food, and had held forth at great length on the virtues of something called «frikadellar»; which, it appeared, was a kind of mince. Lucy (whose cooking consisted of chopping up a few tomatoes in a pan at the last moment, adding whatever was to be cooked, and pouring some cream over the lot) thought it a very lengthy and complicated affair, and decided to have nothing to do with it.

"Are you doing anything tonight?" Froken had asked. "My mother and I are going into Larborough to the theatre. She has not yet seen an English company. We would be delighted if you would care to come with us."

Lucy explained that tonight she was going to a party in Stewart's room to celebrate her Post. "I understand that Staff don't usually go, but I am not real Staff."

Froken slid an eye round at her and said: "You ought to be. You are very good for them."

That medicinal phrase again. As if she were a prescription.

"How?"

"Oh, in ways too subtle for my English-and *much* too subtle for the German language. It is, a little, that you wear heels; a little, that you have written a book; a little, that they don't have to be just a tiny bit afraid of you; a little that-oh, a thousand littles. You have come at a good time for them; a time when they need a distraction that is not-distracting. Oh, dear, I wish my English was better."

"You mean, I am a dose of alkali on an acid stomach."

Froken gave her unexpected chuckle. "Yes, just that. I am sorry you will not be coming to the theatre, but it is a great mark of favour to be invited to a students' party, and you will enjoy it, I think. Everyone will be happy tonight, now that the examinations are over. Once they come back from the match they are free for the week-end. So they will be gay this Saturday. Off the chain," she added, in English.

And off the chain they certainly were. As Lucy came in by the quadrangle door, leaving Froken and her mother to go round to the front of the house where they lived, a blast of sound rose up round her. The rush of bath water on two floors, the calling of innumerable voices, the drumfire of feet on bare oak stairs, singing, whistling, crooning. Both teams had apparently come back-victorious to judge by the atmosphere-and the place was alive. The place was also excited, and one word was woven like a leit-motif through the babble. Arlinghurst. As she walked past the ground-floor bathrooms on her way to the stairs, she heard the first of it. "Have you heard, my dear! Arlinghurst!"

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"What?"
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"Arling-hurst!"

A tap was turned off.

"I can't hear with the blasted water. Where, did you say?"

"Arlinghurst!"

"I don't believe it."

"But yes," said another voice, "it's true."

"It can't be; they don't send First Posters to Arlinghurst."

"No, really it's true. Miss Hodge's sec. told Jolly in confidence and Jolly told her sister in the village and *she* told Miss Nevill at The Teapot, and Miss Nevill talked about it to The Nut Tart when she was there to tea this afternoon with that cousin of hers."

"Is that gigolo here again?"

"I say, Arlinghurst! Who would believe it! Whom do you think they'll give it to?"

"Oh, that's easy."

"Yes, Innes of course."

"Lucky Innes."

"Oh, well, she deserves it."

"Just imagine. Arlinghurst!"

And on the first-floor it was the same; the rushing of bath water, the splashing, the babble, and Arlinghurst.

"But who told you?"

"The Nut Tart."

"Oh, my dear, she's dippy, everyone knows."

"Well, it's a cert for Innes, anyhow, so it's nothing to do with me, I'll probably wind up in the L.C.C."

"She may be dippy, but she's not M.D., and she'd got it pat. She didn't even know what Arlinghurst was, so she wasn't making it up. She said: 'Is it a school? "

"Is it a school! My hat!"

"I say, won't The Hodge be just dizzy with pride, my dears!"

"D'you suppose she'll be dizzy enough to give us tart for supper instead of that milk pudding?"

"I expect Jolly made the puddings yesterday and they're all standing waiting in rows on the hatch."

"Oh, well, they can wait as far as I'm concerned. I'm for Larborough."

"Me, too. I say, is Innes there?"

"No, she's finished. She's dressing."

"I say, let's throw Innes a party, all of us, instead of letting her give a little private one. After all, it's-"

"Yes. Let's do that, shall we? After all, it isn't every day that someone gets a post like that, and Innes deserves it, and everyone will be glad about it, and-"

"Yes, let's have a do in the common-room."

"After all, it's a sort of communal honour. A decoration for Leys."

"Arlinghurst! Who'd have believed it?"

"Arlinghurst!"

Lucy wondered if the meek little secretary's indiscretion had been prompted by the knowledge that the news was about to be made public. Even the cautious and secretive Henrietta could not sit on such a piece of information much longer; if for no other reason than that Arlinghurst would be expecting an answer. Lucy supposed that Henrietta had been waiting until the "bad" week was over before providing her sensation; she could not help feeling that it was a very neat piece of timing.

As she walked along the corridor to her cell at the end, she met Innes, buttoning herself into a fresh cotton frock.

"Well," said Lucy, "it seems to have been a successful afternoon."

"The row, you mean?" Innes said. "Yes, we won. But the row is not a war chant. It's a paean of praise that they will never have to live this week again."

Lucy noticed how unconsciously she had used the word "they." She wondered for a moment at the girl's calm. Had she, possibly, not yet heard about the Arlinghurst vacancy? And then, as Innes moved from the dimness of the corridor into the light from Dakers' wide-open door, Lucy saw the radiance on her face. And her own heart turned over in sympathy. *That* was how it felt, was it? Like seeing Heaven opened.

"You look happy, anyhow," she said, falling back on bald platitude since there were no words to describe what was shining in Innes's eyes.

"To use a phrase of O'Donnell's, I wouldn't call the king my cousin," Innes said, as they moved apart. "You are coming to Stewart's party, aren't you? That's good. We'll meet again there."

Lucy powdered her nose, and decided to go over to the "old house" and see how the Staff were reacting to the news of Arlinghurst. Perhaps there would still be some tea; she had forgotten all about tea and so apparently had the Gustavsens. She rearranged the bottle of champagne which was waiting for Stewart's party in the ice she had begged from Miss Joliffe, regretted yet once more that the Larborough wine merchant had not been able to supply a better year, but trusted (rightly) that Rheims and all its products were simply «champagne» to a student.

To go over to the "old house" one had to pass both the Seniors' bedrooms and the first floor bathrooms again, and it seemed to Lucy that the orchestration of sound had reached a new pitch of intensity, as more and more students heard the news and passed it on and commented on it above the roar of water, and banging of doors, and the thudding of feet. It was strange to come from that blare of sound and excitement into the quiet, the cream paint and mahogany, the tall windows and space, the waiting peace of the "house." She crossed the wide landing and opened the door of the drawing-room. Here too there was quiet, and she had shut the door behind her and come forward into the room before becoming aware of the exact quality of that quiet. Before realising, in fact, that the quiet was electric, and that she had walked into the middle of a Staff row. A row, moreover, if one was to judge from the faces, of most unholy proportions. Henrietta was standing, flushed and defensive and stubborn, with her back to the fireplace, and the others were staring at her, accusing and angry.

Lucy would have beaten a retreat, but someone had automatically poured out a cup of tea and thrust it at her, and she could hardly put it down again and walk out. Though she would have liked to for more reasons than one. The tea was almost black and quite cold.

No one took any notice of Lucy. Either they accepted her as one of themselves, or they were too absorbed in their quarrel to realise her fully. Their eyes had acknowledged her presence with the same absent acquiescence that greets a ticket collector in a railway carriage; a legitimate intruder but not a partaker in discussion.

"It's monstrous," Madame was saying. "Monstrous!" For the first time within Lucy's experience she had discarded her Recamier pose and was sitting with both slender feet planted firmly on the floor.

Miss Lux was standing behind her, her bleak face even bleaker than usual, and two very unusual spots of bright red high on her cheek-bones. Froken was sitting back in one of the chintz-covered chairs looking contemptuous and sullen. And Wragg, hovering by the window, looked as much confused and embarrassed as angry; as if, having so lately come up from the mortal world, she found this battling of Olympians disconcerting.

"I fail to see anything monstrous about it," Henrietta said with an attempt at her Head Girl manner; but even to Lucy's ears it had a synthetic quality. Henrietta was obviously in a spot.

"It is more than monstrous," Madame said, "it is very nearly criminal."

"Marie, don't be absurd."

"Criminal from more than one point of view. You propose to palm off an inferior product on someone who expects the best; and you propose at the same time to lower the credit of Leys so that it will take twenty years to recover it, if it ever recovers. And for what, I ask you? For what? Just to satisfy some whim of your own!"

"I fail to see where the whim comes in," Henrietta snapped, dropping some of her Great Dane dignity at this thrust. "No one here can deny that she is a brilliant student, that she has worked hard and deserved her reward. Even her theoretical work has been consistently good this term."

"Not consistently," said Miss Lux in a voice like water dropping on to a metal pan. "According to the paper I corrected last night, she could not even get a Second in Pathology."

It was here that Lucy stopped wondering what to do with her tea, and pricked up her ears.

"Oh, dear, that is a pity," Henrietta said, genuinely distracted from the main point by this news. "She was doing so well. So much better than I had dared to hope."

"The girl is a moron, and you know it," Madame said.

"But that is nonsense. She is one of the most brilliant students Leys has ever-"

"For God's sake, Henrietta, stop saying that. You know as well as any of us what they mean by brilliant." She flourished a sheet of blue note-paper in her thin brown hand, and holding it at arm's length (she was "getting on" was Madame, and she hated to wear glasses) read aloud. "We wondered if, among your leaving students, you had one brilliant enough to fill this place. Someone who would be "Arlinghurst" from the beginning, and so more part of the school and its traditions than a migrant can ever be, and at the same time continue the Leys connection that has been so fortunate for us. The Leys connection that has been so fortunate! And you propose to end it by sending them Rouse!"

"I don't know why you are all so stubbornly against her. It can be nothing but prejudice. She has been a model student, and no one has ever said a word against her until now. Until I am prepared to give her the rewards of her work. And then you are all suddenly furious. I am entirely at a loss. Froken! Surely you will bear me out. You can never have had a better pupil than Miss Rouse."

"Mees Rouse is a very good gymnast. She is also, I understand from Mees Wragg, a very fine games player. But when she goes out from thees plaace it will not matter any longer that she can do a handstand better than anyone else and that she ees a good half-back. What will matter then is character. And what Mees Rouse has of character is neither very much nor very admirable."

"Froken!" Henrietta sounded shocked. "I thought you liked her."

"Did you?" The two cold, disinterested little words said: I am expected to like all my students; if you had known whom I liked or disliked I should be unworthy.

"Well, you asked Sigrid, and you've certainly been told," Madame said, delighted. "I could not have put it better myself."

"Perhaps-" began Miss Wragg. "I mean, it *is* for gymnastics they want her. They are separate departments at Arlinghurst: the gym., and the games, and the dancing; one person for each. So perhaps Rouse wouldn't be too bad."

Lucy wondered whether this tentative offering was inspired by Rouse's performance for Miss Wragg's department at half-back, or by a desire to smooth things over and draw the two edges of the yawning gap even a little nearer.

"Doreen, my pet," said Madame, in the tolerant tones that one uses to a half-wit, "what they are looking for is not someone who 'wouldn't be too bad'; what they are looking for is someone so outstanding that she can step straight from College to be one of the three gymnasts at the best girls' school in England. Does that sound to you like Miss Rouse, do you think?"

"No. No, I suppose not. It does sound like Innes, I must admit."

"Quite so. It does sound like Innes. And it is beyond the wit of man why it doesn't sound like Innes to Miss Hodge." She fixed Henrietta with her enormous black eyes, and Henrietta winced.

"I've told you! There is a vacancy at the Wycherley Orthop?dic Hospital that would be ideal for Miss Innes. She is excellent at medical work."

"God give me patience! The Wycherley Orthop?dic Hospital!"

"Doesn't the unity of the opposition persuade you that you are wrong, Miss Hodge?" It was Miss Lux, incisive even in her anger. "Being a minority of one is not a very strong position."

But that was the wrong thing to say. If Henrietta had ever been open to persuasion, she was by now far past that stage. She reacted to Miss Lux's logic with a spurt of fury.

"My position as a minority may not be very strong, Miss Lux, but my position as Principal of this college is unquestioned, and what you think or do not think of my decisions is immaterial. I took you into my confidence, as I always have, about the disposal of this vacancy. That you do not agree with me is, of course, regrettable, but of no consequence. It is for me to make decisions here, and in this case I have made it. You are free to disapprove, of course; but not to interfere, I am glad to say."

She picked up her cup with a hand that shook, and put it away on the tea-tray, as was her habit; and then made for the door. Lumbering and hurt, like a wounded elephant, thought Lucy.

"Just a minute, Henrietta!" Madame said, her eyes having lighted on Lucy and a spark of amused malice appearing therein. "Let us ask the outsider and the trained psychologist."

"But I am not a trained psychologist," said poor Lucy.

"Just let us hear what Miss Pym thinks."

"I don't know what Miss Pym has to do with the vacancies-"

"No, not about the appointment. Just what she thinks of these two students. Come along, Miss Pym. Give us your frank opinion. After a mere week among us you cannot be accused of bias."

"You mean Rouse and Innes?" asked Lucy, playing for time. Henrietta had paused with her hand on the door. "I don't know them, of course; but it certainly surprises me that Miss Hodge should think of giving that appointment to Rouse. I don't think she is at all-in fact I think she would be *quite* the wrong person."

Henrietta, to whom this was apparently the last straw, cast her an *et tu Brute* look and blundered out of the room, with a muttered remark about it being "surprising what a pretty face can do to influence people." Which Lucy took to refer to Innes, not to herself.

In the drawing-room was a very crowded silence.

"I thought I knew all about Henrietta," Madame said at last, reflective and puzzled.

"I thought one could trust her to do justice," Miss Lux said, bitter.

Froken got to her feet without a word, and still looking contemptuous and sullen, walked out of the room. They watched her go with gloomy approbation; her silence was comment enough.

"It is a pity that this should have happened, when everything was going so well," Wragg said, producing another of her unhelpful

offerings. She was like someone running round with black-currant lozenges to the victims of an earthquake. "Everyone has been so pleased with their posts, and-"

"Do you think she will come to her senses when she has had time to think it over?" Lux asked Madame.

"She has been thinking it over for nearly a week. Or rather she has had it settled in her mind for nearly a week; so that by now it has become established fact and she will not be able to see it any other way."

"And yet she couldn't have been sure about it-I mean, sure of our reaction-or she would not have kept it to herself until now. Perhaps when she thinks it over-"

"When she thinks it over she will remember that Catherine Lux questioned the Royal Prerogative-"

"But there is a Board in the background. There is no question of Divine Right. There must be someone who can be appealed to against her decision. An injustice like this can't be allowed to happen just because-"

"Of course there is a Board. You met them when you got the job here. You see one of them when she comes to supper on the Friday nights when the lecture happens to be on Yoga, or Theosophy, or Voodoo, or what not. A greedy slug in amber beads and black satin, with the brains of a louse. She thinks Henrietta is wonderful. So do the rest of the Board. And so, let me say it here and now, do I. That is what makes it all so shocking. That Henrietta, the shrewd Henrietta who built this place up from something not much better than a dame's school, should be so blind, so suddenly devoid of the most elementary judgment-it's fantastic. Fantastic!"

"But there must be *something* we can do-"

"My good if tactless Catherine," Madame said rising gracefully to her feet, "all we can do is go to our rooms and pray." She reached for the scarf that even in the hottest weather draped her thin body as she moved from one room to another. "There are also the lesser resorts of aspirin and a hot bath. They may not move the Almighty but they are beneficial to the blood pressure." She floated out of the room; as nearly without substance as a human being can be.

"If Madame can't do anything to influence Miss Hodge, I don't see that anyone else can," Wragg said.

"I certainly can't," Lux said. "I just rub her the wrong way. Even if I didn't, even if I had the charm of Cleopatra and she hung on my every word, how can one reduce a mental astigmatism like that? She is quite honest about it, you see. She is one of the most honest persons I have ever met. She really sees the thing like that; she really sees Rouse as everything that is admirable and deserving, and thinks we are prejudiced and oppositious. How can one alter a thing like that?" She stared a moment, blankly, at the bright window, and then picked up her book. "I must go and change, if I can find a free bathroom."

Her going left Lucy alone with Miss Wragg, who obviously wanted to go too but did not know how to make her departure sufficiently graceful.

"It is a mess, isn't it?" she proffered.

"Yes, it seems a pity," Lucy said, thinking how inadequately it summed up the situation; she was still stunned by the new aspect presented to her. She became aware that Wragg was still in her out-door clothes. "When did you hear about it?"

"I heard the students talking about it downstairs-when we came in from the match, I mean-and I bolted up here to see if it was true, and I walked straight into it. Into the row, I mean. It is a pity; everything was going so well."

"You know that the students take it for granted that Innes will get the post," Lucy said.

"Yes," Wragg sounded sober. "I heard them in the bathrooms. It was a natural thing to think. All of us would take it for granted that Innes would be the one. She is not very good for me-in games, I mean-but she is a good coach. She understands what she is doing. And of course in other things she is brilliant. She really should have been a doctor or something brainy like that. Oh, well, I suppose I must go and get out of these things." She hesitated a moment. "Don't think we do this often, will you, Miss Pym? This is the first time I have seen the Staff het up about anything. We are all such good friends as a rule. That's what makes this such a pity. I wish someone could change Miss Hodge's point of view. But if I know her no one can do that."

No one can do that, they said; but it was just possible that she, Lucy, might. When the door closed behind Wragg she found herself faced with her own dilemma. She had reason to know that Miss Lux's first view of Henrietta's reaction was much truer than her second. That mental astigmatism that Lux talked about was not great enough to exclude a doubt of her own judgment; Lucy had not forgotten the odd guilty look on Henrietta's face last Monday morning when her secretary had tried to bring up the subject of the Arlinghurst letter. It had been an up-to-something look. Not a Father Christmas up-to-something, either. Quite definitely it was something she was a little ashamed of. Astigmatic enough she might be to find Rouse worthy, but not cock-eyed enough to be unaware that Innes had a prior claim.

And that being so, then it was Lucy's duty to put certain facts before her. It was a great pity about the little red book now dissolving into pulp among the weeds-she had been altogether too impulsive about its disposal-but book or no book, she must brave Henrietta and produce some cogent reasons for her belief that Rouse was not a suitable person to be appointed to Arlinghurst.

It surprised her a little to find that an interview with Henrietta on this footing brought back a school-girl qualm that had no place in the bosom of any adult; least of all one who was a Celebrity. But she was greatly fortified by that remark of Henrietta's about "pretty faces." That was a remark that Henrietta really should not have made.

She got up and put the cup of black, cold tea on the tray; noticing regretfully that they had had almond-fingers for tea; she would have very much liked an almond-finger ten minutes ago, but now she could not have eaten even an eclair. It would not be true to say that she had discovered feet of clay in Henrietta, since she had never made any sort of image in Henrietta's likeness. But she *had* looked up to Henrietta as a person of superior worth to her own, and the habit of mind acquired at school had stayed with her. She was therefore shocked to find her capable of what was at worst cheating, and at the very least a *betise*. She wondered what there had been in Rouse to unseat so solid a judgment as Henrietta's. That remark about "pretty faces." That unconsidered, blurted remark. Was there something in that plain, North-Country face that had touched a woman so used to good looks in her students? Was there something in the plain, unloved, hardworking, ambitious Rouse that Henrietta identified with herself? Was it like seeing some old struggle of her own? So that she adopted, and championed, and watched over her unconsciously. Her disappointment over Rouse's comparative failure in Pathology had been so keen that it had distracted her even from the urgent quarrel with her Staff.

Or was it just that Rouse had made good use of those admiring-not to say adoring-looks that she had sampled on the covered way the other morning?

No, not that. Henrietta had her faults but silliness was not one of them. She had, moreover, like everyone else in the scholastic world, served a long apprenticeship to adoration, both real and synthetic. Her interest in Rouse might be heightened by Rouse's obvious discipleship, but the origin of that interest was elsewhere. It was most likely that the Henrietta who had been plain, and unloved, and ambitious, had viewed the plain, and unloved, and ambitious young Rouse with a kindliness that was half recognition.

Lucy wondered whether to go to Henrietta at once, or to wait until she simmered down. The snag was that as Henrietta simmered down, so would her own determination to beard Henrietta on the subject. All things considered, and with the memory of previous fiascos, she thought that she had better go now while her feet would still carry her in the proper direction.

There was no immediate answer to her tap at the office door, and for a moment she hoped that Henrietta had retired to her own room upstairs and so reprieved her from her plain duty for a few hours longer. But no; there was her voice bidding her come in, and in went Lucy, feeling horribly like a culprit and furious with herself for being such a rabbit. Henrietta was still flushed and woundedlooking, and if she had not been Henrietta, Lucy would have said that there were tears in her eyes; but that was manifestly impossible. She was very busy about some papers on her desk, but Lucy felt that until she had knocked Henrietta's only activity had been mental.

"Henrietta," she began, "I'm afraid you thought it presumptuous of me to express an opinion about Miss Rouse." (Oh dear, that sounded very pompous!)

"A little uncalled-for," Henrietta said coldly.

Of all the Henrietta phrases! "Uncalled-for!" "But it *was* called for," she pointed out. "That is just what it was. I should never have dreamed of offering my opinion unasked. The point is, that opinion-"

"I don't think we need discuss it, Lucy. It is a small matter, anyhow, and not one to-"

"But it *isn't* a small matter. That is why I've come to see you."

"We pride ourselves in this country, don't we, that everyone has a right to his opinion, and a right to express it. Well, you expressed it-"

"When I was asked to."

"When you were asked to. And all I say is that it was a little tactless of you to take sides in a matter of which you can know very little, if anything at all."

"But that is just it. I do know something about it. You think I am just prejudiced against Miss Rouse because she is not very attractive —»

"Not very attractive to you, perhaps," amended Henrietta quickly.

"Shall we say not very obviously attractive," Lucy said, annoyed and beginning to feel better. "You think I have judged her merely on her social graces, but that is not so."

"On what else could you judge her? You know nothing of her work."

"I invigilated at one of her examinations."

Lucy observed with satisfaction that this brought Henrietta up short.

There was silence while one could count five.

"And what quality of a student could you possibly test by invigilating at an examination?"

"Her honesty."

"Lucy!" But the tone was not shocked. It was a warning. It meant, if it meant anything: Do-you-know-what-the-punishment-for-slander-is?

"Yes, I said her honesty."

"Are you trying to tell me that you found Miss Rouse-obtaining help during an examination?"

"She did her best. I haven't spent the best years of my life in Fourth-Form circles without knowing the routine. It was at the beginning that I noticed what she was about, and since I didn't want to make a scandal of it I thought the best way was to prevent her from using it."

"Using it? Using what?"

"The little book."

"You mean that you saw a student using a small book at an examination, and said nothing about it?"

"No, of course not. It was only afterwards that I knew about the book. All that I knew at the time was that there was something she was trying to refer to. She had a handkerchief in her left hand- although she hadn't a cold, and seemed to have no legitimate use for the thing and she had that bag-of-sweets-under-the-desk look that you know as well as I do. There wasn't anything under her desk, so I deduced that whatever she had was in her hand with the handkerchief. As I had no proof —»

"Ah! You had no proof."

"No. I had no proof, and I didn't want to upset the whole room by demanding any, so I invigilated from the back of the room, where I was directly behind her, and could see to it that she got no help from anything or anybody."

"But if you did not ask her about the affair, how did you know about a book?"

"I found the book lying by the path to the gymnasium. It was —»

"You mean the book was not in her desk? Not in the room at all?"

"No. If it had been in her desk you would have known about it five minutes later. And if I had found such a book in the examination room I would have brought it to you at once."

"Such a book? What kind of book?"

"A tiny address-book filled with Pathology notes."

"An address-book?"

"Yes. A, arthritis-and so on."

"You mean that the book was merely a book of reference compiled by a student in the course of her study?"

"Not 'merely'."

"And why not 'merely'?"

"Because the whole thing was not much bigger than an out-size postage stamp."

Lucy waited for this to sink in.

"And what connection is there between this book you found and Miss Rouse?"

"Only that no one else in the room had a bag-of-sweets-under-the-desk expression; in fact, no one else seemed to be particularly worried about the paper. And that Rouse was the last to leave the room."

"What has that to do with it?"

"If the book had been dropped before Rouse came out of the examination room it would almost certainly have been picked up by one of the other students. It was a sort of dahlia red, and was lying very obviously on the grass at the edge of the path.

"Not on the path?"

"No," said Lucy, reluctantly. "About half an inch off it."

"So that it could have been passed many times by a crowd of chattering students excited over an examination, and anxious not to be late for their next class?"

"Yes, I suppose it could."

"And was there a name on the book?"

"No."

"No name? No means of identification?"

"Nothing except the script. It was in script, not current form."

"I see." One could see Henrietta bracing herself. "Then you had better bring me the book and we will take the proper steps to have the owner identified."

"I haven't got it," said poor Lucy. "I drowned it."

"You what?"

"I mean, I dropped it into the stream by the games field."

"That was surely a very extraordinary thing to do?" Was there a spark of relief in Henrietta's eye?

"Not really. I suppose it was impetuous. But what was I to do with it? It was a precis of Pathology, and the Pathology Final was over and the book had not been used. Whatever had been planned had not been carried out. Why, then, worry you by bringing the book to you? It seemed to me that the best punishment for whoever had compiled the thing was never to know what had become of it. To live the rest of her days with a question at the back of her mind."

"'Whoever had compiled it. That describes the situation, doesn't it? There is not one iota of evidence to connect the book with Miss Rouse"

"If there had been evidence, as I said before, I would have brought it to you. There is only presumption. But the presumption is very strong. A great many people are ruled out altogether."

"Whv?"

"Those who don't consider themselves likely to be at a loss don't waste time insuring against it. That is to say, those who are good

on the theoretical side are innocent. But you yourself told me that Rouse finds written work extraordinarily difficult."

"So do a great many others."

"Yes. But there is another factor. A great many no doubt find difficulty with theory but don't particularly care as long as they struggle through. But Rouse is brilliant at practical work, and it galls her to be also-ran in examinations. She is ambitious, and a hardworker. She wants the fruits of her labours, and she is very doubtful of getting them. Hence the little book."

"That, my dear Lucy, is psychological theorising."

"Maybe. But psychological theorising is what Madame asked me to do, in the drawing-room. You thought I had based my opinion on a mere prejudice. I thought you ought to know that I had some better foundation for my theorising." She watched Henrietta's flushed face, and wondered if she might venture into the minefield again, now that she had proved that she was not merely wantonly trespassing. "As one friend to another, Henrietta, I don't understand why you even consider sending Rouse to Arlinghurst when you have someone as suitable as Innes." And she waited for the explosion.

But there was no explosion. Henrietta sat in heavy silence, making a dotted pattern with her pen on the fine clean blotting-paper; a measure of her troubled state, since neither doodling nor wasting paper was a habit of Henrietta's.

"I don't think you know much about Innes," she said at length, in a reasonably friendly tone. "Because she has a brilliant mind and good looks you credit her with all the other virtues. Virtues that she quite definitely does not possess. She has no sense of humour, and she does not make friends easily-two serious disabilities in anyone who plans to live the communal life of a residential school. Her very brilliance is a drawback in that it makes it difficult for her to suffer fools gladly. She has a tendency- quite unconscious, I am sure-to look down her nose at the rest of the world." (Lucy remembered suddenly how, this very afternoon, Innes had automatically used the word «they» in referring to the students. Old Henrietta was shrewd enough.)

"In fact, ever since she came here she has left me with the impression that she despises Leys, and is using it only as a means to an end."

"Oh, surely not," Lucy protested mechanically, while her inner self was wondering whether that were indeed so, and whether that accounted for a great deal that had puzzled her about Mary Innes. If being at Leys had indeed been a secret purgatory, a trial endured as a means to an end, that might explain that too-adult reticence, that air of concentration in a person who had no natural need of concentration, that inability to smile.

She remembered, irrelevantly, Desterro's light-hearted account of how she changed her mind and decided to stay at Leys when she saw Innes. It was because Innes was not «of» Leys that Desterro had noticed her on that dreary autumn afternoon, picking her out from the milling crowd as someone from an alien, more adult world.

"But she is very popular with her colleagues," Lucy said aloud.

"Yes, her own set like her well enough. They find her aloofness- intriguing, I think. She is not so popular with children, unfortunately; they find her intimidating. If you looked at her crit. book-the book that the Staff use for reports when they go to outside classes with students-you would find that the word 'antagonistic' appears again and again in describing her attitude."

"Perhaps it is just those eyebrows," Lucy said. She saw that Henrietta, uncomprehending, thought this a mere frivolousness, and added: "Or perhaps like so many people she has an inner doubt about herself, in spite of all appearances to the contrary. That is the usual explanation of antagonism as an attitude."

"I find psychologists' explanations a little too glib," Henrietta said. "If one has not the natural graces to attract friendship, one can at least make an *effort* to be friendly. Miss Rouse does."

(I bet! thought Lucy.)

"It is a great tragedy to lack the natural graces; one is not only denied the ready friendship of one's colleagues but one has to overcome the unreasoning prejudice of those in office. Miss Rouse has fought hard to overcome her natural disabilities: her slowness of mind and her lack of good looks; she goes more than halfway to meet people and puts herself to great pains to be adaptable and pleasant and-and-and acceptable to people. And with her pupils she succeeds. They like her and look forward to seeing her; her reports from her classes are excellent. But with the Staff in their private capacity she has failed. They see only her personal-unattractiveness, and her efforts to be friendly and adaptable have merely annoyed them." She looked up from her pen-patterns and caught Lucy's expression. "Oh, yes, you thought my preference for Rouse as a candidate was the result of blind prejudice, didn't you? Believe me, I have not brought up Leys to its present position without understanding something of how the human mind works. Rouse has worked hard during her years here and has made a success of them, she is popular with her pupils and sufficiently adaptable to make herself acceptable to her colleagues; she has the friendliness and the adaptability that Innes so conspicuously lacks; and there is no reason why she should not go to Arlinghurt with my warm recommendation."

"Except that she is dishonest."

Henrietta flung the pen down on its tray with a clatter.

"That is a sample of what the unattractive girl has to struggle against," she said, all righteousness and wrath. "You think that one out of a score of girls has tried to cheat at an examination, and you pick on Rouse. Why? Because you don't like her face-or her expression, if one must be accurate."

So it had been no use. Lucy drew her feet under her and prepared to go.

"There is nothing at all to connect the little book you found with any particular student. You just remembered that you hadn't liked the looks of Miss Rouse; and so she was the culprit. The culprit- if there is one; I should be sorry to think that any Senior student of mine would stoop to such a subterfuge-the culprit is probably the prettiest and most innocent member of the set. You should know enough of human nature, as distinct from psychology, to know that."

Lucy was not sure whether it was this last thrust or the accusation of fastening crime on to plain faces, but she was very angry by the time she reached the door.

"There is just one point, Henrietta," she said, pausing with the door-knob in her hand.

"Yes?"

"Rouse managed to get a First in all her Finals so far."

"Yes."

"That is odd, isn't it."

"Not at all odd. She had worked very hard."

"It's odd, all the same; because on the occasion when someone was prevented from using the little red book she could not even get a Second."

And she closed the door quietly behind her.

"Let her stew over that," she thought.

As she made her way over to the wing her anger gave way to depression. Henrietta was, as Lux said, honest, and that honesty made arguing with her hopeless. Up to a point she was shrewd and clear-minded, and beyond that she suffered from Miss Lux's «astigmatism»; and for mental astigmatism nothing could be done. Henrietta was not consciously cheating, and therefore could not be reasoned, frightened, nor cajoled into a different course. Lucy thought with something like dismay of the party she was to attend presently. How was she going to face a gathering of Seniors, all speculating about Arlinghurst and rejoicing openly over Innes's good luck?

How was she going to face Innes herself, with the radiance in her eyes? The Innes who "wouldn't call the king her cousin."

Supper at Leys was the formal meal of the day, with the Seniors in their dancing silks and the rest in supper frocks, but on Saturdays when so many had "Larborough leave" it was a much more casual affair. Students sat where they pleased, and, within the bounds of convention, wore what they pleased. Tonight the atmosphere was even more informal than usual since so many had departed to celebrate the end of Examination Week elsewhere, and still more were planning celebration on the spot after supper. Henrietta did not appear-it was understood that she was having a tray in her room-and Madame Lefevre was absent on concerns of her own. Froken and her mother were at the theatre in Larborough, so Lucy shared the top table with Miss Lux and Miss Wragg, and found it very pleasant. By tacit consent the burning question of Arlinghurst was not referred to.

"One would think," said Miss Lux, turning over with a fastidious fork the vegetable mysteries on her plate, "that on a night of celebration Miss Joliffe would have provided something more alluring than a scranbag."

"It's *because* it's a celebration night that she doesn't bother," said Wragg, eating heartily. "She knows quite well that there is enough good food waiting upstairs to sink a battleship."

"Not for us, unfortunately. Miss Pym must put something in her pocket for us when she is coming away."

"I bought some cream puffs in Larborough on the way home from the match," Wragg confessed. "We can have our coffee in my room and have a gorge."

Miss Lux looked as if she would have preferred cheese straws, but in spite of her chill incisiveness she was a kind person, so she said: "I take that very kindly of you, so I do."

"I thought you would be going to the theatre, or I would have suggested it before."

"An out-moded convention," said Miss Lux.

"Don't you like the theatre?" asked the surprised Lucy, to whom the theatre was still a part of childhood's magic.

Miss Lux stopped looking with a questioning revulsion at a piece of carrot, and said: "Have you ever considered what you would think of the theatre if you were taken to it for the first time, now, without the referred affection of childhood pantomimes and what not? Would you really find a few dressed-up figures posturing in a lighted box *entertaining*? And the absurd convention of intervals-once devoted to the promenade of toilettes and now perpetuated for the benefit of the bar. What other entertainment would permit of such arbitrary interruption? Does one stop in the middle of a symphony to go and have a drink?"

"But a play is made that way," Lucy protested.

"Yes. As I said; an out-moded convention."

This dashed Lucy a little, not because of her lingering affection for the theatre, but because she had been so wrong about Miss Lux. She would have said that Miss Lux would be a passionate attender of try-out performances in the drearier suburbs of plays devoted to a Cause and Effects

"Well, I nearly went tonight myself," Wragg said, "just to see Edward Adrian again. I had a terrific rave on him when I was a student. I expect he's a bit passe now. Have you ever seen him?"

"Not on the stage. He used to spend his holidays with us when he was a boy." Miss Lux ran her fork once more through the heap on her plate and decided that there was nothing further worth her attention.

"Used to spend the holidays! At your house?"

"Yes, he went to school with my brother."

"Good heavens! how absolutely incredible!"

"What is incredible about it?"

"I mean, one just doesn't think of Edward Adrian as being an ordinary person that people know. Just a schoolboy like anyone else."

"A very horrid little boy."

"Oh, no!"

"A quite revolting little boy. Always watching himself in mirrors. And possessed of a remarkable talent for getting the best of everything that was going." She sounded calm, and clinical, and detached.

"Oh, Catherine, you shatter me."

"No one I have ever met had the same genius for leaving someone else holding the baby as Teddy Adrian."

"He has other kinds of genius though, surely," Lucy ventured.

"He has talent, yes."

"Do you still see him?" asked Wragg, still a little dazzled to be getting first-hand news of Olympus.

"Only by accident. When my brother died we gave up the house that our parents had had, and there were no more family gatherings."

"And you've never seen him on the stage?"

"Never."

"And you didn't even go a sixpenny bus-ride into Larborough to see him play tonight."

"I did not. I told you, the theatre bores me inexpressibly."

"But it's Shakespeare."

"Very well, it's Shakespeare. I would rather sit at home and read him in the company of Doreen Wragg and her cream puffs. You won't forget to put something in your pocket for us when you leave your feast, will you, Miss Pym? Anything gratefully received by the starving proletariat. Macaroons, Mars bars, blood oranges, left-over sandwiches, squashed sausage rolls-"

"I'll put a hat round," promised Lucy. "I'll pass the hat and quaver: 'Don't forget the Staff."

But as she lifted the champagne bottle out of its melting ice in her wash-bowl she did not feel so gay about it. This party was going to be an ordeal, there was no denying it. She tied a big bow of ribbon to the neck of the bottle, to make it look festive and to take away any suggestion of "bringing her own liquor"; the result was rather like a duchess in a paper cap, but she didn't think that the simile would occur to the students. She had hesitated over her own toilette, being divided between a rough-and-tumble outfit suitable to a cushions-on-the-floor gathering, and the desire to do her hosts honour. She had paid them the compliment of putting on her «lecture» frock, and doing an extra-careful make-up. If Henrietta had taken away from this party by her vagaries, she, Lucy, would bring all she could to it.

Judging by the noise in other rooms, and the running back and fore with kettles, Stewart's was not the only party in Leys that evening. The corridors smelt strongly of coffee, and waves of laughter and talk rose and died away as doors were opened and shut. Even the Juniors seemed to be entertaining; if they had no Posts to celebrate they had the glory of having their first Final behind them. Lucy remembered that she had not found out from The Nut Tart how she had fared in that Anatomy Final. ("Today's idea may be nonsense tomorrow, but a clavicle is a clavicle for all time.") When she passed the students' notice-board again she must look for Desterro's name.

She had to knock twice at the door of Number Ten before the sound penetrated, but when a flushed Stewart opened the door and drew her in a sudden shyness fell on the group, so that they got to their feet in polite silence like well-brought-up children.

"We are so glad to have you," Stewart was beginning, when Dakers sighted the bottle and all formality was at an end.

"Drink!" she shrieked. "As I live and breathe, drink! Oh, Miss Pym you are a poppet!"

"I hope that I am not breaking any rules," Lucy said, remembering that there had been an expression in Miss Joliffe's eye that she had still not accounted for, "but it seemed to me an occasion for champagne."

"It's a triple occasion," Stewart said. "Dakers and Thomas are celebrating too. It couldn't be *more* of an occasion. It was lovely of you to think of the champagne."

"It will be sacrilege to drink it out of tooth-glasses," Hasselt said.

"Well, anyhow, we drink it now, as aperitif. A course by itself. Pass up your glasses everyone. Miss Pym, the chair is for you."

A basket chair had been imported and lined with a motley collection of cushions; except for the hard chair at the desk it was the only legitimate seat in the room, the rest of the party having brought their cushions with them and being now disposed about the floor or piled in relaxed heaps like kittens on the bed. Someone had tied a yellow silk handkerchief over the light so that a golden benevolence took the place of the usual hard brightness. The twilight beyond the wide-open window made a pale blue back-cloth that would soon be a dark one. It was like any student party of her own college days, but as a picture it had more brilliance than her own parties had had. Was it just that the colours of the cushions were gayer? That the guests were better physical types, without lank hair, spectacles, and studious pallor?

No, of course it wasn't that. She knew what it was. There was no cigarette smoke.

"O'Donnell isn't here yet," Thomas said, collecting tooth-glasses from the guests and laying them on the cloth that covered the desk.

"I expect she's helping Rouse to put up the boom," a Disciple said.

"She can't be," a second Disciple said, "it's Saturday."

"Even a P.T.I. stops work on a Sunday," said a third.

"Even Rouse," commented the fourth.

"Is Miss Rouse still practising rotatory travelling?" Lucy asked.

"Oh, yes," they said. "She will be, up to the day of the Dem."

"And when does she find time?"

"She goes when she is dressed in the morning. Before first class."

"Six o'clock," said Lucy. "Horrible."

"It's no worse than any other time," they said. "At least one is fresh, and there is no hurry, and you can have the gym. to yourself. Besides, it's the only possible time. The boom has to be put away before first class."

"She doesn't have to go," Stewart said, "the knack has come back. But she is terrified she will lose it again before the Dem."

"I can understand that, my dear," Dakers said. "Think what an *immortal* fool one would feel hanging like a sick monkey from the boom, with all the elite looking on, and Froken simply *stabbing* one with that eye of hers. My dear, *death* would be a happy release. If Donnie isn't doing her usual chore for Rouse, *where* is she? She's the only one not here."

"Poor Don," Thomas said, "she hasn't got a post yet." Thomas with her junior-of-three in Wales was feeling like a millionaire.

"Don't worry over Don," Hasselt said, "the Irish always fall on their feet."

But Miss Pym was looking round for Innes, and not finding her. Nor was Beau there.

Stewart, seeing her wandering eye, interpreted the question in it and said: "Beau and Innes wanted me to tell you how sorry they were to miss the party, and to hope that you would be their guest at another one before the end of term."

"Beau will be giving one for Innes," Hasselt said. "To celebrate Arlinghurst."

"As a matter of fact, we're all giving a party for Innes," a Disciple said.

"A sort of general jamboree," said a second Disciple.

"It's an honour for College, after all," said a third.

"You'll come to that, won't you, Miss Pym," said a fourth, making it a statement rather than a question.

"Nothing would please me more," Lucy said. And then, glad to skate away from such thin ice: "What has happened to Beau and Innes?"

"Beau's people turned up unexpectedly and took them off to the theatre in Larborough," Stewart said.

"That's what it is to own a Rolls," Thomas said, quite without envy. "You just dash around England as the fit takes you. When my people want to move they have to yoke up the old grey mare-a brown cob, actually-and trot twenty miles before they reach any place at all."

"Farmers?" Lucy asked, seeing the lonely narrow Welsh road winding through desolation.

"No, my father is a clergyman. But we have to keep a horse to work the place, and we can't have a horse and a car too."

"Oh, well," said a Disciple arranging herself more comfortably on the bed, "who wants to go to the theatre anyhow?"

"Of all the boring ways of spending an evening," said a second.

"Sitting with one's knees in someone's back," said a third.

"With one's eyes glued to opera glasses," said a fourth.

"Why opera glasses?" asked Lucy, surprised to find Miss Lux's attitude repeated in a gathering where sophistication had not yet destroyed a juvenile thirst for entertainment.

"What would you see without them?"

"Little dolls walking about in a box."

"Like something on Brighton pier."

"Except that on Brighton pier you can see the expression on the faces."

They were rather like something from Brighton pier themselves, Lucy thought. A turn. A sort of extended Tweedledum and Tweedledee. They were apparently not moved to speech unless one of their number made a remark; when the others felt called upon to produce corroborative evidence.

"Me, I'm only too glad to put my feet up and do nothing for a change," Hasselt said. "I'm breaking in a new pair of ballet shoes for the Dem. and my blisters are spectacular."

"Miss Hasselt," said Stewart, obviously quoting, "it is a student's business to preserve her body in a state of fitness at all times."

"That may be," said Hasselt, "but I'm not standing in a bus for five miles on a Saturday night to go anywhere, least of all to a theatre."

"Anyhow, it's only Shakespeare, my dears," Dakers said. "It is the cause, my soul! " she burlesqued, clutching at her breast.

"Edward Adrian, though," volunteered Lucy, feeling that her beloved theatre must have one champion.

"Who is Edward Adrian?" Dakers asked, in genuine inquiry.

"He's that weary-looking creature who looks like a moulting eagle," Stewart said, too busy about her hostess's duties to be aware of the reaction on Lucy: that was a horribly vivid summing-up of Edward Adrian, as seen by the unsentimental eyes of modern youth. "We used to be taken to see him when I was at school in Edinburgh."

"And didn't you enjoy it?" Lucy asked, remembering that Stewart's name headed the lists on the notice-board along with Innes's and Beau's, and that mental activity would not be for her the chore that it probably was for some of the others.

"Oh, it was better than sitting in a class-room," Stewart allowed. "But it was all terribly-old-fashioned. Nice to look at, but a bit dreary. I'm a tooth-glass short."

"Mine, I suppose," O'Donnell said, coming in on the words and handing over her glass. "I'm afraid I'm late. I was looking for some shoes that my feet would go into. Forgive these, won't you, Miss Pym," she indicated the bedroom slippers she was wearing. "My feet have died on me."

"Do vou know who Edward Adrian is?" Lucy asked her.

"Certainly I do," O'Donnell said. "I've had a rave on him ever since I went to see him at the age of twelve in Belfast."

"You seem to be the only person in this room either to know or to admire him."

"Ah, the heathen," said O'Donnell, casting a scornful eye on the gathering-and it seemed to Lucy that O'Donnell was suspiciously bright about the eyes, as if she had been crying. "It's in Larborough I would be this minute, sitting at his feet, if it wasn't practically the end of term and I lacked the price of a seat."

And if, thought Lucy pitying, you hadn't felt that backing out of this party would be put down to your being the only one present not yet to have a post. She liked the girl who had dried her eyes and thought of the bedroom slipper excuse and come gaily to the party that was none of hers.

"Well," said Stewart, busy with the wire of the cork, "now that O'Donnell is here we can open the bottle."

"Good heavens, champagne!" O'Donnell said.

The wine came foaming into the thick blunt tooth-glasses, and they turned to Lucy expectantly.

"To Stewart in Scotland, to Thomas in Wales, to Dakers at Ling Abbey," she said.

They drank that.

"And to all our friends between Capetown and Manchester," Stewart said.

And they drank that too.

"Now, Miss Pym, what will you eat?"

And Lucy settled down happily to enjoy herself. Rouse was not going to be a guest; and she was by some special intervention of Providence in the shape of rich parents in a Rolls-Royce going to be spared the ordeal of sitting opposite an Innes bursting with happiness that had no vestige of foundation.

But by noon on Sunday she was much less happy, and was wishing that she had had the foresight to invent a luncheon engagement in Larborough and so remove herself out of the area of the explosion that was coming. She had always hated explosions, literal and metaphorical; people who blew into paper bags and then burst them had always been regarded by Lucy with a mixture of abhorrence and awe. And the paper bag that was going to be burst after lunch was a particularly nasty affair; an explosion whose reverberations would be endless and unpredictable. At the back of her mind was the faint hope that Henrietta might have changed her mind; that the silent witness of those tell-tale lists on the notice-board might have proved more eloquent than her own poor words. But no amount of encouragement could make this hope anything but embryonic. She remembered only too clearly that a shaking of Henrietta's faith in Rouse would not mean a corresponding access of belief in Innes as a candidate. The best that could be hoped for was that she might write to the Head at Arlinghurst and say that there was no Leaving Student good enough for so exalted a post; and that would do nothing to save Innes from the grief that was coming to her. No, she really should have got herself out of Leys for Sunday lunch and come back when it was all over. Even in Larborough, it was to be supposed, there were people that one might conceivably be going to see. Beyond those over-rich villas of the outskirts with their smooth sanded avenues and their pseudo everything, somewhere between them and the soot of the city there must be a belt of people like herself. Doctors, there must be, for instance. She could have invented a doctor friend-except that doctors were listed in registers. If she had thought in time she could have invited herself to lunch with Dr Knight; after all, Knight owed her something. Or she could have taken sandwiches and just walked out into the landscape and not come home till bed-time.

Now she sat in the window-seat in the drawing-room, waiting for the Staff to assemble there before going down to the dining-room; watching the students come back from church and wondering if she had sufficient courage and resolution to seek out Miss Joliffe even yet and ask for sandwiches; or even just walk out of College with no word said-after all, one didn't starve in the English country even on a Sunday. As Desterro said, there were always villages.

Desterro was the first to come back from church; leisured and fashionable as always. Lucy leant out and said: "Congratulations on your knowledge of the clavicle." For she had looked at the board on the way to bed last night.

"Yes, I surprised myself," said The Nut Tart. "My grandmother will be so pleased. A 'first' sounds so well, don't you think? I boasted about it to my cousin, but he said that was most unseemly. In England one waits to be asked about one's successes."

"Yes," agreed Lucy, sadly, "and the worst of it is so few people ask. The number of lights under bushels in Great Britain is tragic."

"Not Great Britain," amended Desterro. "He says-my cousin-that it is all right north of the river Tweed. That is the river between England and Scotland, you know. You can boast in Dunbar but not in Berwick, Rick says."

"I should like to meet Rick," Lucy said.

"He thinks you are quite adorable, by the way."

"Me?"

"I have been telling him about you. We spent all the intervals talking about you."

"Oh you went to the theatre, did you?"

"He went. I was taken."

"Did you not enjoy it, then?" asked Lucy, mentally applauding the young man who made The Nut Tart do anything at all that she did not want to do.

"Oh, it was as they say, 'not too bad. A little of the grand manner is nice for a change. Ballet would have been better. He is a dancer manque, that one."

"Edward Adrian?"

"Yes." Her mind seemed to have strayed away. "The English wear all one kind of hat," she said reflectively. "Up at the back and down in front."

With which irrelevance she trailed away round the house, leaving Lucy wondering whether the remark was occasioned by last night's audience or Dakers' advent up the avenue. Dakers' Sunday hat was certainly a mere superior copy of the hat she had worn at school, and under its short brim her pleasant, waggish, pony's face looked more youthful than ever. She took off the hat with a gesture when she saw Miss Pym, and loudly expressed her delight in finding Lucy alive and well after the rigours of the night before. This was the first morning in *all* her college career, it seemed, when she had positively *failed* to eat a fifth slice of bread and marmalade.

"Gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins," she observed, "so I had need of shriving this morning. I went to the Baptist place because it is nearest."

"And do you feel shriven?"

"I don't know that I do, now you come to mention it. It was all very conversational."

Lucy took it that a shamed soul demanded ritual.

"Very friendly, though, I understand."

"Oh, *frightfully*. The clergyman began his sermon by leaning on one elbow and remarking: 'Well, my friends, it's a very fine day. And everyone shook hands with everyone coming out. And they had some fine warlike hymns," she added, having thought over the Baptist good points. She looked thoughtful for a moment longer and then said: "There are some Portsmouth Brothers on the Larborough road-"

"Plymouth."

"Plymouth what?"

"Plymouth Brethren, I suppose you mean."

"Oh, yes; I know it had something to do with the Navy. And I'm Pompey by inclination. Well, I think I shall sample *them* next Sunday. You don't suppose they're *private*, or anything like that?"

Miss Pym thought not, and Dakers swung her hat in a wide gesture of burlesque farewell and went on round the house.

By ones and twos, and in little groups, the students returned from their compulsory hour out of College. Waving or calling a greeting or merely smiling, as their temperaments were. Even Rouse called a happy "Good morning, Miss Pym!" as she passed. Almost last came Beau and Innes; walking slowly, serene and relaxed. They came to rest beneath the window looking up at her.

"Heathen!" said Beau, smiling at her.

They were sorry they missed the party, they said, but there would be others.

"I shall be giving one myself when the Dem. is over," Beau said. "You'll come to that, won't you?"

"I shall be delighted. How was the theatre?"

"It might have been worse. We sat behind Colin Barry."

"Who is he?"

"The All-England hockey 'half."

"And I suppose that helped Othello a lot."

"It helped the intervals, I assure you."

"Didn't you want to see Othello?"

"Not us! We were dying to go to Irma Ireland's new film-*Flaming Barriers*. It sounds very sultry but actually, I believe, it's just a good clean forest fire. But my parents' idea of a night out is the theatre and a box of chocolates for the intervals. We couldn't disappoint the old dears."

"Did they like it?"

"Oh, they loved it. They spent the whole of supper talking about it."

"You're a fine pair to call anyone 'heathen, " Lucy observed."

"Come to tea with the Seniors this afternoon," Beau said.

Lucy said hastily that she was going out to tea.

Beau eyed her guilty face with something like amusement, but Innes said soberly: "We should have asked you before. You are not going away before the Dem., are you?"

"Not if I can help it."

"Then will you come to tea with the Seniors next Sunday?"

"Thank you. If I am here I should be delighted."

"My lesson in manners," said Beau.

They stood there on the gravel looking up at her, smiling. That was how she always remembered them afterwards. Standing there in the sunlight, easy and graceful; secure in their belief in the world's rightness and in their trust in each other. Untouched by doubt or blemish. Taking it for granted that the warm gravel under their feet was lasting earth, and not the precipice edge of disaster.

It was the five-minute bell that roused them. As they moved away, Miss Lux came into the room behind, looking grimmer than Lucy had ever seen her.

"I can't imagine why I'm here," she said. "If I had thought in time I wouldn't be taking part in this God-forsaken farce at all."

Lucy said that that was exactly what she herself had been thinking.

"I suppose there has been no word of Miss Hodge having a change of heart?"

"Not as far as I know. I'm afraid it isn't likely."

"What a pity we didn't *all* go out to lunch. If Miss Hodge had to call Rouse's name from a completely deserted table, College would at least be aware that we had no part in this travesty."

"If you didn't have to mark yourself 'out' on the slate before eleven, I would go now, but I haven't the nerve."

"Oh well, perhaps we can do something with our expressions to convey that we consider the whole thing just a bad smell."

It's the being there to countenance it she minds, thought Lucy; while I just want to run away from unpleasantness like a child. Not for the first time, she wished she was a more admirable character.

Madame Lefevre came floating in wearing a cocoa-brown silk affair that was shot with a metallic blue in the high-lights; which made her look more than ever like some exotic kind of dragon-fly. It was partly those enormous headlamps of eyes, of course; like some close-up of an insect in half-remembered Nature «shorts»; the eyes and the thin brown body, so angular yet so graceful. Madame, having got over her immediate rage, had, it seemed, recovered her detached contempt for the human species, and was regarding the situation with malicious if slightly enjoyable distaste.

"Never having attended a wake," she said, "I look forward with interest to the performance today."

"You are a ghoul," Lux said; but without feeling, as if she were too depressed to care greatly. "Haven't you done anything to alter her mind?"

"Oh, yes, I have wrestled with the Powers of Darkness. Wrestled very mightily. Also very cogently, may I say. With example and precept. Who was it who was condemned to push an enormous stone up a hill for ever? Extraordinary how appropriate these mythological fancies still are. I wonder if a ballet of Punishments would be any good? Sweeping out stables, and so forth. To Bach, perhaps. Though Bach is not very inspirational, choreographically speaking. And a great many people rise up and call one damned, of course, if one uses him."

"Oh, stop it," Lux said. "We are going to connive at an abomination and you speculate about choreography!"

"My good, if too earnest, Catherine, you must learn to take life as it comes, and to withdraw yourself from what you cannot alter. As the Chinese so rightly advise: When rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it. We connive at an abomination, as you so exquisitely put it. True. But as intelligent human beings we concern ourselves with the by-products of the action. It will be interesting to see how, for instance, the little Innes reacts to the stimulus. Will the shock be a mortal one, will it galvanise her into action, or will it send her into crazy throes of galvanic activity that has no meaning?"

"Damn your metaphors. You are talking nonsense-and you know it. It is someone else's rape we are invited to countenance; and as far as I know there is nothing in the history of philosophy, Chinese or otherwise, to recommend that."

"Rape?" said Froken, coming in followed by her mother. "Who is going to be raped?"

"Innes," Lux said dryly.

"Oh." The twinkle died out of Froken's eye, leaving it cold and pale. "Yes," she said, reflectively. "Yes."

Fru Gustavsen's round "Mrs Noah" face looked troubled. She looked from one to another, as if hoping for some gleam of assurance, some suggestion that the problem was capable of being resolved. She came over to Lucy in the window-seat, ducked her head in a sharp Good-morning, and said in German:

"You know about this thing the Principal does? My daughter is very angry. Very angry my daughter is. Not since she was a little girl have I seen her so angry. It is very bad what they do? You think so too?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I do."

"Miss Hodge is a very good woman. I admire her very much. But when a good woman makes a mistake it is apt to be much worse than a bad woman's mistake. More colossal. It is a pity."

It was a great pity, Lucy agreed.

The door opened and Henrietta came in, with a nervous Wragg in tow. Henrietta appeared serene, if a little more stately than usual (or than circumstances demanded) but Wragg cast a placatory smile round the gathering as if pleading with them to be all girls together and look on the bright side. Their close-hedged antagonism dismayed her, and she sent an appealing glance at Madame, whose dogsbody she normally was. But Madame's wide sardonic gaze was fixed on Henrietta.

Henrietta wished them all good morning (she had breakfasted in her own room) and she had timed her entrance very neatly, for before her greeting was finished, the murmur of the distant gong made the moment one for action, not conversation.

"It is time for us to go down, I think," Henrietta said, and led the way out.

Madame rolled her eye at Lux in admiration of this piece of generalship, and fell in behind.

"A wake indeed!" Lux said to Lucy as they went downstairs.

"It feels more like Fotheringay."

The demure silence waiting them in the dining-room seemed to Lucy's heightened imagination to be charged with expectation, and certainly during the meal College seemed to be more excited than she had ever seen it. The babble of conversation deepened to a roar, so that Henrietta, coming-to between her busy gobbling of the meat course and her expectation of the pudding, sent a message by Wragg to Beau, asking that College should contain themselves.

For a little they were circumspect, but soon they forgot and the talk and laughter rose again.

"They are excited to have Examinations Week over," Henrietta said indulgently, and let them be.

This was her only contribution to conversation-she never did converse while eating-but Wragg served up brave little platitudes at regular intervals, looking from one to the other of the shut faces round the table hopefully, like a terrier which has brought a bone to lay at one's feet. One could almost see her tail wag. Wragg was to be the innocent means of execution, the passive knife in the guillotine, and she felt her position and was tacitly apologising for it. Oh, for Pete's sake, she seemed to be saying, I'm only the Junior Gymnast in this set-up, it's not my fault that I have to tag along in her rear; what do you expect me to do? — tell her to announce the damned thing herself?

Lucy was sorry for her, even while her pious pieces of the obvious made her want to scream. Be quiet, she wanted to say, do be quiet, there is nothing for a situation like this but silence.

At last Henrietta folded up her napkin, looked round the table to make sure that all her Staff had finished eating, and rose. As the Staff rose with her, College came to its feet with an alacrity and a unanimity that was rare. It was apparent that they had been waiting for this moment. Against her will, Lucy turned to look at them; at the rows of bright expectant faces, half-smiling in their eagerness; it did nothing to comfort her that they looked as if at the slightest provocation they would break into a cheer.

As Henrietta turned to the door and the Staff filed after her, Wragg faced the delighted throng and said the words that had been given her to say.

"Miss Hodge will see Miss Rouse in her office when luncheon is over."

Lucy could no longer see the faces, but she felt the silence go suddenly blank. Become void and dead. It was the difference between a summer silence full of bird-notes and leaves and wind in the grasses, and the frozen stillness of some Arctic waste. And then, into the dead void just as they reached the door, came the first faint sibilant whisper as they repeated the name.

"Rouse!" they were saying. "Rouse!"

And Lucy, stepping into the warm sunlight, shivered. The sound reminded her of frozen particles being swept over a snow surface by a bitter wind. She even remembered where she had seen and heard those particles: that Easter she had spent on Speyside when they had missed the Grantown bus and they were a long way from home and they had to walk it every foot of the way, under a leaden sky into a bitter wind over a frozen world. She felt a long way from home now, crossing the sunny courtyard to the quadrangle door, and the sky seemed to her as leaden as any Highland one in a March storm. She wished for a moment that she were at home, in her own quiet little sitting-room, settling down for a Sunday afternoon of unbroken peace, untouched by human problems and unhurt by human griefs. She toyed with the idea of inventing an excuse to go when tomorrow morning's post would give her a chance; but she had looked forward like a child to the Demonstration on Friday, and she had now a quite personal interest in what had promised to be for her merely something new in spectacles. She knew all the Seniors personally and a great many of the Juniors; she had talked "Dem." with them, shared their half-fearful anticipation of it, even helped to make their costumes. It was the summit, the triumphant flower, the resounding full-stop of their College careers, and she could not bear to go without seeing it; without being part of it.

She had dropped the rest of the Staff, who were bound for the front of the house, but Wragg, coming behind her to pin a notice on the students' board, mopped her forehead in frank relief and said: "Thank heaven that is over. I think it was the worst thing I have ever had to do. I couldn't eat my lunch with thinking of it." And Lucy remembered that there had indeed been the phenomenon of a large piece of tart unfinished on Miss Wragg's plate.

That was life, that was. Innes had Heaven's door shut in her face, and Wragg couldn't finish her pudding!

No one had yet come out of the dining-room-College appetites being so much larger than Staff ones, their meals lasted at least ten or fifteen minutes longer-so the corridors were still deserted as Lucy went up to her room. She resolved to get away from Leys before the crowd of students overran the countryside. She would go away deep into the green and white and yellow countryside, and smell the may and lie in the grass and feel the world turning on its axis, and remember that it was a very large world, and that College griefs were wild and bitter but soon over and that in the Scale of Things they were undeniably Very Small Beer.

She changed her shoes to something more appropriate to field paths, crossed to the "old house" and ran down the front stairs and out by the front door so as to avoid the students who would now be percolating out of the dining-room. The "old house" was very silent and she deduced that there had been no lingering in the drawing-room after lunch today. She skirted the house and made for the field behind the gymnasium, with vague thoughts of Bidlington and The Teapot stirring in her mind. The hedge of may was a creamy foam on her right and on her left the buttercups were a golden sea. The elms, half-floating in the warm light, were anchored each to its purple shadow, and daisies patterned the short grass under her feet. It was a lovely world, a fine round gracious world, and no day for-Oh, poor Innes! — no day for the world to turn over and crush one.

It was when she was debating with herself whether to cross the little bridge, to turn down-stream to Bidlington, or up-stream to the unknown, that she saw Beau. Beau was standing in the middle of the bridge watching the water, but with her green linen dress and bright hair she was so much a part of the sunlight-and-shadow under the willows that Lucy had been unaware that anyone was there. As she came into the shade herself and could see more clearly, Lucy saw that Beau was watching her come, but she gave her no greeting. This was so unlike Beau that Lucy was daunted.

"Hullo," she said, and leaned beside her on the wooden rail. "Isn't it beautiful this afternoon?" *Must* you sound so idiotic? she asked berself

There was no answer to this, but presently Beau said: "Did you know about this appointment?"

"Yes," said Lucy. "I–I heard the Staff talking about it."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"Then you knew this morning when you were talking to us."

"Yes. Why?'

"It would have been kind if someone had warned her."

"Warned whom?"

"Innes. It isn't very nice to have your teeth kicked in in public."

She realised that Beau was sick with rage. Never before had she seen her even out of temper, and now she was so angry that she could hardly talk.

"But how could I have done that?" she asked reasonably, dismayed to be taken personally to task for something that she considered none of her business. "It would have been disloyal to mention it before Miss Hodge had announced her decision. For all I knew she might have altered that decision; when I left her it was still possible that she might see things from-" She stopped, realising where she was headed. But Beau too had realised. She turned her head sharply to look at Miss Pym.

"Oh. You argued with her about it. You didn't approve of her choice, then?"

"Of course not." She looked at the angry young face so near her own and decided to be frank. "You might as well know, Beau, that no one approves. The Staff feel about it very much as you do. Miss Hodge is an old friend of mine, and I owe her a great deal, and admire her, but where this appointment is concerned she is 'on her own. I have been desolated ever since I first heard of it, I would do

anything to reverse it, to waken up tomorrow and find that it is just a bad dream; but as to warning anyone-" She lifted her hand in a gesture of helplessness.

Beau had gone back to glaring at the water. "A clever woman like you could have thought of something," she muttered.

The "clever woman" somehow made Beau of a sudden very young and appealing; it was not like the confident and sophisticated Beau to look for help or to think of her very ordinary Pym self as clever. She was after all a child; a child raging and hurt at the wrong that had been done her friend. Lucy had never liked her so well.

"Even a hint," Beau went on, muttering at the water. "Even a suggestion that there might be someone else in the running. *Anything* to warn her. To make the shock less shattering. To put her on her guard, so that she wasn't wide open. It had to be punishment, but it needn't have been a massacre. You could have sacrificed a little scruple in so good a cause, couldn't you?"

Lucy felt, belatedly, that perhaps she might have.

"Where is she?" she asked. "Where is Innes?"

"I don't know. She ran straight out of College before I could catch her up. I know she came this way, but I don't know where she went from here."

"She will take it very badly?"

"Did you expect her to be brave and noble about the hideous mess?" Beau said savagely, and then, instantly: "Oh, I'm sorry. I do beg your pardon. I know you're sorry about it too. I'm just not fit to be spoken to just now."

"Yes, I am sorry," Lucy said. "I admired Innes the first time I saw her, and I think she would have been an enormous success at Arlinghurst."

"Would have been," muttered Beau.

"How did Miss Rouse take the news? Was she surprised, do you think?"

"I didn't wait to see," Beau said shortly. And presently: "I think I shall go up-stream. There is a little thorn wood up there that she is very fond of; she may be there."

"Are you worried about her?" Lucy asked; feeling that if it were merely comforting that Beau planned, Innes would surely prefer solitude at the moment.

"I don't think she is busy committing suicide, if that is what you mean. But of course I am worried about her. A shock like that would be bad for anyone-especially coming now, at the end of term when one is tired. But Innes-Innes has always cared too much about things." She paused to look at the water again. "When we were Juniors and Madame used to blister us with her sarcasm-Madame can be simply unspeakable, you know-the rest of us just came up in weals but Innes was actually flayed; just raw flesh. She never cried, as some of the others did when they'd had too much for one go. She just-just burned up inside. It's bad for you to burn up inside. And once when-" She stopped, and seemed to decide that she had said enough. Either she had been on the verge of an indiscretion or she came to the conclusion that discussing her friend with a comparative stranger, however sympathetic, was not after all the thing to do. "She has no oil on her feathers, Innes," she finished.

She stepped off the bridge and began to walk away up the path by the willows. "If I was rude," she said, pausing just before she disappeared, "do forgive me. I didn't mean to be."

Lucy went on looking at the smooth silent water, wishing passionately that she could recover the little red book which she had consigned so smugly to the brook two days ago, and thinking of the girl who had no "duck's back"-no protective mechanism against the world's weather. The girl who could neither whimper nor laugh; who "burned up inside" instead. She rather hoped that Beau would not find her until the worst was over; she had not run to Beau for sympathy, she had run as far and as fast from human company as she could, and it seemed only fair to let her have the solitude she sought.

It would do Beau no harm at any rate, Lucy thought, to find that the world had its snags and its disappointments; life had been much too easy for Beau. It was a pity that she had to learn at Innes's expense.

She crossed the bridge into the games field, turned her face to open country and took the hedge gaps as they came; hoping that she might not overtake Innes, and determined to turn a blind eye in her direction if she did. But there was no Innes. No one at all moved in the Sunday landscape. Everyone was still digesting roast beef. She was alone with the hedges of may, the pasture, and the blue sky. Presently she came to the edge of a slope, from which she could look across a shallow valley to successive distances, and there she sat with her back against an oak, while the insects hummed in the grass, and the fat white clouds sailed up and passed, and the slow shadow of the tree circled round her feet. Lucy's capacity for doing nothing was almost endless, and had been the despair of both her preceptors and her friends.

It was not until the sun was at hedge level that she roused herself to further decision. The result of her self-communing was a realisation that she could not face College supper tonight; she would walk until she found an inn, and in the half-dark she would come back to a College already hushed by the «bedroom» bell. She made a wide circle round, and in half an hour saw in the distance a steeple she recognised, whereupon she jettisoned her thoughts of an inn and wondered if The Teapot was open on Sundays. Even if it wasn't perhaps she could persuade Miss Nevill to stay her pangs with something out of a can. It was after seven before she reached the outskirts of Bidlington, and she looked at the Martyr's Memorial-the only ugly erection in the place-with something of a fellow interest, but the open door of The Teapot restored her. *Dear* Miss Nevill. Dear large clever business-like accommodating Miss Nevill.

She walked into the pleasant room, already shadowed by the opposite cottages, and found it almost empty. A family party occupied the front window, and in the far corner were a young couple who presumably owned the expensive coupe which was backed in at the end of the garden. She thought it clever of Miss Nevill to manage that the room should still look spotless and smell of flowers after the deluge of a Sunday's traffic in June.

She was looking round for a table when a voice said: "Miss Pym!"

Lucy's first instinct was to bolt: she was in no mood for student chat at the moment; and then she noticed that it was The Nut Tart. The Nut Tart was the female half of the couple in the corner. The male half was undoubtedly "my cousin"; the Rick who thought her adorable and who was referred to in College parlance as "that gigolo."

Desterro rose and came over to meet her-she had charming manners on formal occasions-and drew her over to their table. "But this

is lovely!" she said. "We were talking of you, and Rick was saying how much he would like to meet you, and here you are. It is magic. This is my cousin, Richard Gillespie. He was christened Riccardo, but he thinks it sounds too like a cinema star."

"Or a band leader," Gillespie said, shaking hands with her and putting her into a chair. His unaccented manner was very English, and did something to counteract his undoubted resemblance to the more Latin types of screen hero. Lucy saw where the «gigolo» came from; the black smooth hair that grew so thick, the eyelashes, the flare of the nostrils, the thin line of dark moustache were all according to the recipe; but nothing else was, it seemed to Lucy. Looks were what he had inherited from some Latin ancestor; but manner, breeding, and character seemed to be ordinary public school. He was considerably older than Desterro-nearly thirty, Lucy reckoned-and looked a pleasant and responsible person.

They had just ordered, it seemed, and Richard went away to the back premises to command another portion of Bidlington rarebit. "It is a cheese affair," Desterro said, "but not those Welsh things you get in London teashops. It is a very rich cheese sauce on very soft buttery toast, and it is flavoured with odd things like nutmeg-I think it is nutmeg-and things like that, and it tastes divine."

Lucy, who was in no state to care what food tasted like, said that it sounded delicious. "Your cousin is English, then?"

"Oh, yes. We are not what you call first cousins," she explained as Richard came back. "The sister of my father's father married his mother's father."

"In simpler words," Richard said, "our grandparents were brother and sister."

"It may be simpler, but it is not explicit," Desterro said, with all the scorn of a Latin for the Saxon indifference to relationships.

"Do you live in Larborough?" Lucy asked Richard.

"No, I work in London, at our head office. But just now I am doing liaison work in Larborough."

In spite of herself Lucy's eye swivelled round to Desterro, busy with a copy of the menu.

"One of our associated firms is here, and I am working with them for a week or two," Rick said smoothly; and laughed at her with his eyes. And then, to put her mind completely at rest: "I came with a chit to Miss Hodge, vouching for my relationship, my respectability, my solvency, my presentability, my orthodoxy-"

"Oh, be quiet, Rick," Desterro said, "it is not my fault that my father is Brazilian and my mother French. What is saffron dough-cake?"

"Teresa is the loveliest person to take out to a meal," Rick said. "She eats like a starved lion. My other women friends spend the whole evening reckoning the calories and imagining what is happening to their waists."

"Your other women friends," his cousin pointed out a trifle astringently, "have not spent twelve months at Leys Physical Training College, being sweated down to vanishing point and fed on vegetable macedoine."

Lucy, remembering the piles of bread wolfed by the students at every meal, thought this an overstatement.

"When I go back to Brazil I shall live like a lady and eat like a civilised person, and it will be time then to consider my calories." Lucy asked when she was going back.

"I am sailing on the last day of August. That will give me a little of the English summer to enjoy between the last day of College and my going away. I like the English summer. So green, and gentle, and kind. I like everything about the English except their clothes, their winter, and their teeth. Where is Arlinghurst?"

Lucy, who had forgotten Desterro's abrupt hopping from one subject to another, was too surprised by the name to answer immediately and Rick answered for her. "It's the best girls' school in England," he finished, having described the place. "Why?"

"It is the College excitement at the moment. One of our students is going there straight from Leys. One would think she had at least been made a Dame, to listen to them."

"A legitimate reason for excitement, it seems to me," Rick observed. "Not many people get professional plums straight out of college."

"Yes? It really is an honour then, you think?"

"A very great one, I imagine. Isn't it, Miss Pym?"

"Very.'

"Oh, well. I am glad of it. It is sad to think of her wasting the years in a girls' school, but if it is an honour for her, then I am glad."

"For whom?" Lucy asked.

"For Innes, of course."

"Were you not at lunch today?" asked Lucy, puzzled.

"No. Rick came with the car and we went over to the Saracen's Head at Beauminster. Why? What has that to do with this school affair?"

"It isn't Innes who is going to Arlinghurst."

"Not Innes! But they all said she was. Everyone said so."

"Yes, that is what everyone expected, but it didn't turn out like that."

"No? Who is going, then?"

"Rouse."

Desterro stared.

"Oh, no. No, that I refuse to believe. It is quite simply not possible."

"It is true, I am afraid."

"You mean that-that someone-that they have preferred that *canaille*, that *espece d'une-*!"

"Teresa!" warned Rick, amused to see her moved for once.

Desterro sat silent for a space, communing with herself.

"If I were not a lady," she said at length in clear tones, "I would spit!"

The family party looked over, surprised and faintly alarmed. They decided that it was time they were going, and began to collect their things and reckon up what they had had.

"Now look what you have done," Rick said. "Alarmed the lieges."

At this moment the rarebits arrived from the kitchen, with Miss Nevill's large chintz presence behind them; but The Nut Tart, far from being distracted by the savoury food, remembered that it was from Miss Nevill that she had first had news of the Arlinghurst vacancy, and the subject took a fresh lease of life. It was Rick who rescued Lucy from the loathed subject by pointing out that the rarebit was rapidly cooling; Lucy had a strong feeling that he himself cared nothing for the rarebit, but that he had somehow become aware of her tiredness and her distaste for the affair; and she felt warm and grateful to him and on the point of tears.

"After all," pointed out Rick as The Nut Tart at last turned her attention to her food, "I don't know Miss Innes, but if she is as wonderful as you say she is bound to get a very good post, even if it isn't exactly Arlinghurst."

This was the argument with which Lucy had sought to comfort herself all the long afternoon. It was reasonable, logical, and balanced; and as a sort of moral belladonna-plaster it was so much red flannel. Lucy understood why The Nut Tart rejected it with scorn.

"How would *you* like to have *that* preferred to you?" she demanded through a large mouthful of rarebit. «That» was Rouse. "How would you like to believe that they were going to pay you honour, a fine public honour, and then have them slap your face in front of everyone?"

"Having your teeth kicked in," Beau had called it. Their reactions were remarkably similar. The only difference was that Desterro saw the insult, and Beau the injury.

"And we had such a lovely happy morning in this very room the other day with Innes's father and mother," Desterro went on, her fine eyes wandering to the table where they had sat. This, too, Lucy had been remembering. "Such nice people, Rick; I wish you could see them. We were all nice people together: me, and Miss Pym, and the Inneses *pere et mere*, and we had an interval of civilisation and some good coffee. It was charming. And now-"

Between them, Lucy and Rick steered her away from the subject; and it was not until they were getting into the car to go back to Leys that she remembered and began to mourn again. But the distance between Bidlington and Leys as covered by Rick's car was so short that she had no time to work herself up before they were at the door. Lucy said goodnight and was going to withdraw tactfully, but The Nut Tart came with her. "Goodnight, Rick," she said, casually. "You are coming on Friday, aren't you?"

"Nothing will stop me," Rick assured her. "Three o'clock, is it?"

"No, half-past two. It is written on your invitation card. The invitation I sent you. For a business person you are not very accurate."

"Oh, well, my business things I naturally keep in files."

"And where do you keep my invitation?"

"On a gold chain between my vest and my heart," Rick said, and went the winner out of that exchange.

"Your cousin is charming," Lucy said, as they went up the steps together.

"You think so? I am very glad. I think so too. He has all the English virtues, and a little spice of something that is not English virtue at all. I am glad he is coming to see me dance on Friday. What makes you smile?"

Lucy, who had been smiling at this typically Desterro view of her cousin's presence on Friday, hastened to change the subject,

"Shouldn't you be going in by the other door?"

"Oh, yes, but I don't suppose anyone will mind. In a fortnight I shall be free to come up these steps if I like-I shall not like, incidentally-so I might as well use them now. I do not take well to tradesmen's entrances."

Lucy had meant to pay her respects to the Staff before going to her room in the wing, but the hall was so quiet, the air of the house so withdrawn, that she was discouraged and took the line of least resistance. She would see them all in the morning.

The Nut Tart paid at least a token obedience to College rules, and it was apparent from the hush in the wing corridor that the «bedroom» bell must have gone some minutes ago; so they said goodnight at the top of the stairs, and Lucy went away to her room at the far end. As she undressed she found that her ear was waiting for a sound from next door. But there was no sound at all; nor was there any visible light from the window, as she noticed when she drew her own curtains. Had Innes not come back?

She sat for a while wondering whether she should do something about it. If Innes had not come back, Beau would be in need of comfort. And if Innes had come back and was silent, was there perhaps some impersonal piece of kindness, some small service, that she could do to express her sympathy without intrusion?

She switched off her light and drew back the curtains, and sat by the open window looking at the brightly lit squares all round the little quadrangle-it was considered an eccentricity to draw a curtain in this community-watching the separate activities of the now silent and individual students. One was brushing her hair, one sewing something, one putting a bandage on her foot (a Foolish Virgin that one; she was hopping about looking for a pair of scissors instead of having begun with the implement already laid out, like a good masseuse), one wriggling into a pyjama jacket, one swatting a moth.

Two lights went out as she watched. Tomorrow the waking bell would go at half-past five again, and now that examinations were over they need no longer stay awake till the last moment over their notebooks.

She heard footsteps come along her own corridor, and got up, thinking they were coming at her. Innes's door opened quietly, and shut. No light was switched on, but she heard the soft movements of someone getting ready for bed. Then bedroom slippers in the corridor, and a knock. No answer.

"It's me: Beau," a voice said; and the door was opened. The murmur of voices as the door closed. The smell of coffee and the faint chink of china.

It was sensible of Beau to meet the situation with food. Whatever demons Innes had wrestled with during the long hours between one o'clock and ten she must now be empty of emotion and ready to eat what was put in front of her. The murmur of voices went on until the "lights out" bell sounded; then the door opened and closed again, and the silence next-door merged into the greater silence that enveloped Leys.

Lucy fell into bed, too tired almost to pull up the covers; angry with Henrietta, sad for Innes, and a little envious of her in that she had a friend like Beau.

She decided to stay awake a little and think of some way in which she could express to poor Innes how great was her own sympathy and how deep her own indignation; and fell instantly asleep.

Monday was an anticlimax. Lucy came back into a community that had talked itself out on the subject of Arlinghurst. Both Staff and students had had a whole day's leisure in which to spread themselves over the sensation, and by night-time there was nothing more to be said; indeed every possible view had already been repeated *ad nauseam*; so that with the resumption of routine on Monday the affair had already slipped into the background. Since she still had her breakfast brought to her by the devoted Miss Morris, she was not there to see Innes's first public appearance; and by the time she came face to face with the students as a body, at lunch, habit had smoothed over the rough places and College looked much as usual.

Innes's face was composed, but Lucy thought that its normal withdrawn expression had become a shut-down look; whatever emotions she still wrestled with, they were under hatches and battened down. Rouse looked more than ever like Aunt Celia's cat, Philadelphia, and Lucy longed to shut her out-of-doors and let her mew. The only curiosity she had had about the affair was to know how Rouse took that unexpected announcement; she had even gone the length of asking Miss Lux on the way down to lunch.

"What did Rouse look like when she heard the news?"

"Ectoplasm," said Miss Lux.

"Why ectoplasm?" Lucy had asked, puzzled.

"It is the most revolting thing I can think of."

So her curiosity remained unsatisfied. Madame twitted her about her desertion of them yesterday, but no one wanted to harp on the probable reason for it. Already the shadow of the Demonstration, only four days away, loomed large over them all; Arlinghurst was a vesterday's sensation and already a little stale. College was once more into its stride.

Indeed only two small incidents livened the monotony of routine between Monday and Friday.

The first was Miss Hodge's offer to Innes of the post at the Wycherley Orthopaedic Hospital, and Innes's refusal of it. The post was then offered to and gratefully accepted by a much-relieved O'Donnell. ("Darling, how nice!" Dakers had said. "Now I can sell you my clinic overalls which I shall never use again, my dear." And sell them she did; and was so delighted to have good hard cash in her purse so near the end of term that she instantly began to hawk the rest of her belongings round the wing, and was only dissuaded when Stewart asked caustically if the safety-pins were standard equipment.)

The second incident was the arrival of Edward Adrian, thespian.

This unlooked-for occurrence took place on Wednesday. Wednesday was swimming afternoon, and all the Juniors and such Seniors as had no afternoon patients were down at the pool. Lucy, who by prayer, counting, and determination, could just get across the bath, took no part in this exercise in spite of warm invitations to come in and be cool. She spent half an hour watching the gambols, and then walked back to the house for tea. She was crossing the hall to the stairs when one of the Disciples-she thought it was Luke, but she was still not quite certain about them-dashed out of the clinic door and said:

"Oh, Miss Pym, would you be an angel and sit on Albert's feet for a moment?"

"Sit on Albert's feet?" repeated Lucy, not quite sure that she had heard aright.

"Yes, or hold them. But it's easier to sit on them. The hole in the strap has given way, and there isn't another that isn't in use." She ushered the dazed Lucy into the quiet of the clinic, where students swathed in unfamiliar white linen superintended their patients' contortions, and indicated a plinth where a boy of eleven or so was lying face down. "You see," she said, holding up a leather strap, "the thing has torn away from the hole, and the hole in front is too tight and the one behind too loose. If you would just hang on to his feet for a moment; if you wouldn't rather sit on them."

Lucy said hastily that she would prefer to hang on.

"All right. This is Miss Pym, Albert. She is going to be the strap for the nonce."

"Hullo, Miss Pym," said Albert, rolling an eye round at her.

Luke-if it was she-seized the boy under the shoulders and yanked him forward till only his legs remained on the plinth. "Now clamp a hand over each ankle and hang on, Miss Pym," she commanded, and Lucy obeyed, thinking how well this breezy bluntness was going to suit Manchester and how extremely heavy a small boy of eleven was when you were trying to keep his ankles down. Her eyes strayed from what Luke was doing to the others, so strange and remote in this new guise. Was there no end to the facets of this odd life? Even the ones she knew well, like Stewart, were different, seen like this. Their movements were slower, and there was a special bright artificially-interested voice that they used to patients. There were no smiles and no chatter; just a bright hospital quiet. "Just a little further. That's right." "That is looking much better today, isn't it!" "Now, we'll try that once more and then that will be all for today."

Through a gap in Hasselt's overall as she moved, Lucy caught a glimpse of silk, and realised that she was already changed for dancing, there being no interval between finishing her patient and appearing in the gym. Either she had already had tea, or would snatch a cup en route.

While she was thinking of the oddity of this life of dancing silks under hospital clothes, a car passed the window and stopped at the front door. A very fashionable and expensive car of inordinate length and great glossiness, chauffeur-driven. It was so seldom nowadays that one saw anyone but an invalid driven by a chauffeur that she watched with interest to see who might emerge from it.

Beau's mother, perhaps? That was the kind of car that went with a butler, undoubtedly.

But what came out of the car was a youngish man-she could see only his back-in the kind of suit one sees anywhere between St. James's Street and the Duke of York's Steps any time between October and the end of June. What with the chauffeur and the suit Lucy ran through in her mind the available Royalties, but could not find an appropriate one; Royalty drove itself nowadays, anyhow.

"Thank you very much, Miss Pym. You've been an enormous help. Say thank you, Albert."

"Thank you, Miss Pym," Albert said dutifully; and then, catching her eye, winked at her. Lucy winked back, gravely.

At this moment O'Donnell erupted into the room clutching the large sifter of talcum powder that she had been having refilled by Froken in the further room, and hissed in an excited whisper: "What do you think! *Edward Adrian!* In the car. *Edward Adrian!*"

"Who cares?" Stewart said, relieving her of the sifter. "You were a damned long time getting the talc."

Lucy closed the clinic door behind her and emerged into the hall. O'Donnell had spoken truth. It was Edward Adrian who was standing in the hall. And Miss Lux had also spoken truth. For Edward Adrian was examining himself in the mirror.

As Lucy climbed the stairs she met Miss Lux coming down, and as she turned to the second flight could see their meeting.

"Hullo, Teddy," Miss Lux said, without enthusiasm.

"Catherine!" Adrian said, with the most delighted enthusiasm, going forward to meet her as if about to embrace her. But her cool solitary hand, outstretched in conventional greeting, stopped him.

"What are you doing here? Don't tell me you have developed a 'niece' at Leys."

"Don't be a beast, Cath. I came to see you, of course. Why didn't you tell me you were here? Why didn't you come to see me, so that we could have had a meal together, and a talk about old —»

"Miss Pym," Miss Lux's clear accents came floating up the staircase, "don't run away. I want you to meet a friend of mine."

"But Catherine — " she heard him say in quick low protest.

"It's the *famous* Miss Pym," Miss Lux said, in a you'll-like-that-you-silly-creature tone, "and a great admirer of yours," she added as a final snare.

Does he realise how cruel she is being? she wondered as she waited for them to come up to her, or is his self-satisfaction too great to be pierced by her rating of him?

As they went together into the deserted drawing-room, she remembered suddenly Stewart's description of him as a "weary-looking creature who looked like a moulting eagle" and thought how apt it was. He had good looks of a sort, but although he could not be much older than forty-forty-three or four, perhaps-they already had a preserved air. Without his paints and his pencils and his toupees, he looked tired and worn, and his dark hair was receding. Lucy felt suddenly sorry for him. With the youth and strength and beauty of Desterro's Rick fresh in her mind, she found the spoiled and famous actor somehow pitiful.

He was being charming to her-he knew all about her book; he read all the best-sellers-but with one eye on Miss Lux while she examined what was left of tea, inspected the contents of the tea-pot, and apparently deciding that a little more hot water would meet the case, lit the burner under the tea-kettle again. There was something in that consciousness of Catherine Lux's presence that puzzled Lucy. It wasn't in the part, as she had imagined the part for him. The successful star calling on the humble lecturer at a girls' college should surely show more detachment; more willingness to peacock in front of the stranger, after the manner of actors. He was "doing his act" for her, of course; all his charm was turned full on, and it was a very considerable charm; but it was mere reflex action. All his interest was centred round the cool scraggy woman who rated him at some washy tea. It couldn't be very often, Lucy thought with amusement, that Edward Adrian arrived on any doorstep without trumpets; for nearly twenty years-ever since that first heart-breaking Romeo had brought tears to the eyes of critics sick of the very name of Montague- his comings and goings had been matters of moment, he had moved in a constant small eddy of importance; people ran to do his bidding and waited for his pleasure; they gave him things and asked nothing in return; they gave up things for him and expected no thanks. He was Edward Adrian, household word, two feet high on the bills, national possession.

But he had come out this afternoon to Leys to see Catherine Lux, and his eyes followed her round like an eager dog's. The Catherine whose estimate of him was a little hot water added to the tea-pot. It was all very strange.

"I hope you are doing well in Larborough, Teddy?" Lux asked, with more politeness than interest.

"Oh, yes; fair. Too many schools, but one must put up with that when one plays Shakespeare."

"Don't you like playing to young people?" Lucy asked, remembering that the young people she had met lately had not greatly liked having to listen to him.

"Well-they don't make the best audience in the world, you know. One would prefer adults. And they get cut rates, of course; which doesn't help the takings. But we look on it as an investment," he added with generous tolerance. "They are the future theatre-goers, and must be trained up in the way they should go."

Lucy thought that the training, if judged by results, had been singularly unsuccessful. The way the young went was in a bee-line to something called *Flaming Barriers*. It wasn't even true to say that they "didn't go" to the theatre; it was much more positive than that: they fled from it.

However, this was a polite tea-party and no time for home truth. Lucy asked if he was coming to the Demonstration-at which Miss Lux looked annoyed. He had never heard of a Demonstration and was all eagerness. It was years since he had seen anyone do any more P.T. than putting their toes under the wardrobe and waving their torso about. Dancing? Goodness, was there dancing? But of course he would come. And what was more, they should come back with him to the theatre and have supper with him afterwards.

"I know Catherine hates the theatre, but you could stand it for once, couldn't you, Catherine? It's *Richard III* on Friday night, so you wouldn't have to put up with me in a romantic effort. It isn't a good play, but the production is wonderful, even if it is I who say it that shouldn't."

"A criminal libel on a fine man, a blatant piece of political propaganda, and an extremely silly play," Lux opined.

Adrian smiled broadly, like a schoolboy. "All right, but sit through it and you shall see how good a supper the Midland at Larborough can provide when egged on by a miserable actor. They even have a Johannisberger."

A faint colour showed in Lux's cheek at that.

"You see I remember what you like. Johannisberger, as you once remarked, tastes of flowers, and will take the stink of the theatre out of your nostrils."

"I never said it stank. It creaks."

"Of course it does. It has been on its last legs for quite two hundred years."

"Do you know what it reminds me of? The Coronation Coach. A lumbering anachronism; an absurd convention that we go on

making use of because of inherited affection. A gilded relic-"

The kettle boiled, and Miss Lux poured the hot water into the pot.

"Give Miss Pym something to eat, Teddy."

An almost nursery tone, Lucy thought, taking one of the curled-up sandwiches from the plate he offered her. Was that what attracted him? Was it a sort of nostalgia for a world where he was taken for granted? He would not like such a world for long, that was certain, but it was quite possible that he wearied sometimes of the goldfish life he led, and would find a refreshment in the company of someone to whom he was just Teddy Adrian who used to come in the holidays.

She turned to say something to him, and surprised the look in his eyes as he watched Catherine spurning the various eatables. The amusement, the affection, that lit them might be a brother's, but there was something else. A-hopelessness, was it? Something like that. Something, anyhow, that had nothing to do with brotherliness; and that was very odd in a Great Star looking at the plain and ironic Mistress of Theory at Levs.

She looked across at the unconscious Catherine, and for the first time saw her as Edward Adrian saw her. As a woman with the makings of a *belle laide*. In this scholastic world one accepted her "good" clothes, her simple hairdressing, her lack of make-up, as the right and appropriate thing, and took her fine bones and lithe carriage for granted. She was just the plain and clever Miss Lux. But in the theatre world how different she would be! That wide supple mouth, those high cheek-bones with the hollow under them, the short straight nose, the good line of the lean jaw-they cried aloud for make-up. From the conventional point of view Lux had the kind of face that, as errand boys say, would "stop a clock"; but from any other view-point it was a face that would stop them eating at the Iris if she walked in at lunch time properly dressed and made-up.

A combination of *belle laide* and someone who knew him «when» was no inconsiderable attraction. For the rest of tea-time Lucy's mind was busy with revision.

As soon as she decently could she retired, leaving them to the tete-a-tete that he had so obviously sought; the tete-a-tete that Miss Lux had done her best to deny him. He pleaded once more for a theatre party on Friday night-his car would be there and the Dem. would be over by six o'clock and College supper would be nothing but an anti-climax, and *Richard III* might be a lot of nonsense but it was lovely to look at, he promised them, and the food at the Midland was really wonderful since they had lured the chef away from Bono in Dover Street, and it was a very long time since he had seen Catherine and he had not talked half enough to the clever Miss Pym who had written that wonderful book, and he was dead sick anyhow of the company of actors who talked nothing but theatre and golf, and just to please him they might come-and altogether what with his practised actor's charm and his genuine desire that they should say yes, it was agreed that on Friday night they should go back to Larborough with him, witness his production of *Richard III*, and be rewarded with a good supper and a lift home.

As she crossed to the wing, however, Lucy found herself a little depressed. Yet once more she had been wrong about Miss Lux. Miss Lux was not an unwanted plain woman who found compensation in life by devoting herself to a beautiful younger sister. She was a potentially attractive creature who so little needed compensation that she couldn't be bothered with one of the most successful and handsome men in the world today.

She had been all wrong about Miss Lux. As a psychologist she began to suspect she was a very good teacher of French.

The only person who was moved by Edward Adrian's incursion into the College world was Madame Lefevre. Madame, as the representative of the theatre world in College, evidently felt that her own share in this visit should have been a larger one. She also gave Miss Lux to understand that she had, in the first place, no right to know Edward Adrian, but that, in the second place, having known him she had no right to keep him to herself. She was comforted by the knowledge that on Friday she would see him in person, and be able to talk to him in his own language, so to speak. He must have felt greatly at sea, she gave them to understand, among the aborigines of Leys Physical Training College.

Lucy, listening to her barbed silkinesses at lunch on Thursday, hoped that she would not ingratiate herself sufficiently with Adrian to be included in the supper party; she was looking forward to Friday night, and she most certainly would not look forward any more if Madame was going to be watching her all evening with those eyes of hers. Perhaps Miss Lux would put a spoke in her wheel in time. It was not Miss Lux's habit to put up with something that was not to her mind.

Still thinking of Madame and Miss Lux and tomorrow night, she turned her eyes absently on the students, and saw Innes's face. And her heart stopped.

It was three days, she supposed, since she had seen Innes for more than a moment in passing; but could three days have done this to a young girl's face?. She stared, trying to decide where the change actually lay. Innes was thinner, and very pale, certainly, but it was not that. It was not even the shadows under her eyes and the small hollow at the temple. Not even the expression; she was eating her lunch with her eyes on the plate in apparent calm. And yet the face shocked Lucy. She wondered if the others saw; she wondered that no one had mentioned it. The thing was as subtle and as obvious as the expression on the face of the Mona Lisa; as indefinable and as impossible to ignore.

So that is what it is to "burn up inside," she thought. "It is bad to burn up inside," Beau had said. Verily it must be bad if it ravaged a face like that. How could a face be at the same time calm and-and look like that? How, if it came to that, could one have birds tearing at one's vitals and still keep that calm face?

Her glance went to Beau, at the head of the nearer table, and she caught Beau's anxious look at Innes.

"I hope you gave Mr Adrian an invitation card?" Miss Hodge said to Lux.

"No," said Lux, bored with the subject of Adrian.

"And I hope you have told Miss Joliffe that there will be one more for tea."

"He doesn't eat at tea-time, so I didn't bother."

Oh, stop talking little sillinesses, Lucy wanted to say, and look at Innes. What is happening to her? Look at the girl who was so radiant only last Saturday afternoon. Look at her. What does she remind you of? Sitting there so calm and beautiful and all wrong inside. What does she remind you of? One of those brilliant things that grow in the woods, isn't it? One of those apparently perfect things that collapse into dust at a touch because they are hollow inside.

"Innes is not looking well," she said in careful understatement to Lux as they went upstairs.

"She is looking very ill," Lux said bluntly. "And would you wonder?"

"Isn't there something one can do about it?" Lucy asked.

"One could find her the kind of post she deserves," Lux said dryly. "As there is no post available at all, that doesn't seem likely to materialise."

"You mean that she will just have to begin to answer advertisements?"

"Yes. It is only a fortnight to the end of term, and there are not likely to be any more posts in Miss Hodge's gift now. Most places for September are filled by this time. The final irony, isn't it? That the most brilliant student we have had for years is reduced to application-in-own-handwriting-with-five-copies-of-testimonials-not-returnable."

It was damnable, Lucy thought; quite damnable.

"She was offered a post, so that lets Miss Hodge out."

"But it was a medical one, and she doesn't want that," Lucy said.

"Oh, yes, yes! you don't have to convert me; I'm enlisted already."

Lucy thought of tomorrow, when the parents would come and radiant daughters would show them round, full of the years they had spent here and the new achievement that was theirs. How Innes must have looked forward to that; looked forward to seeing the two people who loved her so well and who had by care and deprivation managed to give her the training she wanted; looked forward to putting Arlinghurst in their laps.

It was bad enough to be a leaving student without a post, but that was a matter susceptible to remedy. What could never be remedied was the injustice of it. It was Lucy's private opinion that injustice was harder to bear than almost any other inflicted ill. She could remember yet the surprised hurt, the helpless rage, the despair that used to consume her when she was young and the victim of an injustice. It was the helpless rage that was worst; it consumed one like a slow fire. There was no outlet, because there was nothing one could do about it. A very destructive emotion indeed. Lucy supposed that she had been like Innes, and lacked a sense of humour. But did the young ever have the detachment necessary for a proper focusing of their own griefs? Of course not. It was not people of forty who went upstairs and hanged themselves because someone had said a wrong word to them at the wrong moment, it was adolescents of fourteen.

Lucy thought she knew the passion of rage and disappointment and hate that was eating Innes up. It was enormously to her credit that she had taken the shock with outward dignity. A different type would have babbled to all and sundry, and collected sympathy like a street singer catching coins in a hat. But not Innes. A sense of humour she might lack-oil on her feathers, as Beau said-but the suffering

that lack entailed was her own affair; not to be exhibited to anyone-least of all to people she unconsciously referred to as "them."

Lucy had failed to think of a nice non-committal way of expressing her sympathy; flowers and sweets and all the conventional marks of active friendship were not to be considered, and she had found no substitute; and she was disgusted with herself now to realise that Innes's trouble, even though it was next-door to her all night, had begun to fade into the back-ground for her. She had remembered it each night as Innes came to her room after the «bedroom» bell, and while the small noises next-door reminded her of the girl's existence. She had wondered and fretted about her for a little before falling to sleep. But during the crowded many-faceted days she had come near forgetting her.

Rouse had made no move to give a Post party on Saturday night; but whether this was due to tact, an awareness of College feeling on the subject, or the natural thrift with which, it seemed, she was credited, no one knew. The universal party that had been so triumphantly planned for Innes was no more heard of; a universal party for Rouse was something that was apparently not contemplated.

Although, even allowing for the fact that Lucy had not been present at the height of the excitement when presumably tongues would have wagged with greater freedom, College had been strangely reticent about the Arlinghurst appointment. Even little Miss Morris, who chattered with a fine lack of inhibition every morning as she planked the tray down, made no reference to it. In this affair Lucy was for College purposes «Staff»; an outsider; perhaps a sharer in blame. She did not like the idea at all.

But what she liked least of all, and now could not get out of her mind, was Innes's barren tomorrow. The tomorrow that she had slaved those years for, the tomorrow that was to have been such a triumph. Lucy longed to provide her with a post at once, instantly, here and now; so that when tomorrow that tired happy woman with the luminous eyes came at last to see her daughter she would not find her empty-handed.

But of course one could not hawk a P.T.I. from door to door like a writing-pad; nor offer her to one's friends like a misfit frock. Goodwill was not enough. And goodwill was practically all she had.

Well, she would use the goodwill and see where it got her. She followed Miss Hodge into her office as the others went upstairs, and said: "Henrietta, can't we *invent* a post for Miss Innes? It seems all wrong that she should be jobless."

"Miss Innes will not be long jobless. And I can't imagine what consolation an imaginary post would be to her meanwhile."

"I didn't say imagine, I said invent; manufacture. There must be dozens of places all up and down the country that are still vacant. Couldn't we bring the job and Innes together somehow without her going through the slow suspense of applying? That waiting, Henrietta. Do you remember what it used to be like? The beautifully written applications and the testimonials that never came back."

"I have already offered Miss Innes a post and she has refused it. I don't know what more I can do. I have no more vacancies to offer."

"No, but you could get in touch with some of those advertised vacancies on her behalf, couldn't you?"

"I? But that would be most irregular. And quite unnecessary. She naturally gives my name as a reference when she applies; and if she were not commendable —»

"But you could-oh, you could ask for particulars of the post since you have a particularly brilliant student —»

"You are being absurd, Lucy."

"I know, but I want Innes to be very much sought-after by five o'clock this afternoon."

Miss Hodge, who did not read Kipling-or indeed, acknowledge his existence-stared.

"For a woman who has written such a noteworthy book-Professor Beatock praised it yesterday at the University College tea-you have an extraordinarily impulsive and frivolous mind."

This defeated Lucy, who was well aware of her mental limitations. Punctured, she stood looking at Henrietta's broad back in the window.

"I am greatly afraid," Henrietta said, "that the weather is going to break. The forecast this morning was anything but reassuring, and after so long a spell of perfect summer we are due for a change. It would be a tragedy if it decided to change tomorrow of all days."

A tragedy, would it! My God, you big lumbering silly woman, it is you who have the frivolous mind. I may have a C3 intelligence and childish impulses but I know tragedy when I see it and it has nothing to do with a lot of people running to save their party frocks or the cucumber sandwiches getting wet. No, by God, it hasn't.

"Yes, it would be a pity, Henrietta," she said meekly, and went away upstairs.

She stood for a little at the landing window watching the thick black clouds massing on the horizon, and hoping evilly that tomorrow they would swamp Leys in one grand Niagara so that the whole place steamed with damp people drying like a laundry. But she noticed almost immediately the heinousness of this, and hastily revised her wish. Tomorrow was their great day, bless them; the day they had sweated for, borne bruises and sarcasm for, been pummelled, broken, and straightened for, hoped, wept, and lived for. It was plain justice that the sun should shine on them.

Besides, it was pretty certain that Mrs Innes had only one pair of «best» shoes.

Each successive day of her stay at Leys saw Lucy a little more wide awake in the mornings. When the monstrous clamour of the 5.30 bell had first hurled her into wakefulness, she had turned on her other side as soon as the noise stopped and had fallen asleep again. But habit was beginning to have its way. Not only did she not fall asleep again after the early waking, but for the last day or two she had been sufficiently conscious to know in some drowsy depths of her that the waking bell was about to ring. On Demonstration morning she made history by wakening before the reveille.

What woke her was a faint fluttering under the point of her sternum: a feeling that she had not had since she was a child. It was associated with prize-giving days at school. Lucy had always had a prize of sorts. Never anything spectacular, alas-2nd French, 3rd Drawing, 3rd Singing-but she was definitely in the money. Occasionally, too, there was a «piece» to be played-the Rachmaninoff Prelude, for one; not the DA, DA, DA one but the DA-de-de-de; with terrific concentration on the de-de-de-and consequently a new frock. Hence the tremor under the breastbone. And today, all those years afterwards, she had recaptured the sensation. For years any flutterings in that region had been mere indigestion-if indigestion can ever be mere. Now, because she was part of all the young emotion round her, she shared the thrill and the anticipation.

She sat up and looked at the weather. It was blank and grey, with a cool mist that might later lift on a blazing day. She got up and went to the window. The silence was absolute. Nothing stirred in the still greyness but the College cat, picking its way in an annoyed fashion over the dew-wet stones, and shaking each foot in turn as protest against the discomfort. The grass was heavy with dew, and Lucy, who had always had a perverted affection for wet grass, regarded it with satisfaction.

The silence was ripped in two by the bell. The cat, as if suddenly reminded of urgent business, sprang into wild flight. Giddy crunched past on his way to the gymnasium; and presently the faint whine of his vacuum-cleaner could be heard, like some far-distant siren. Groans and yawns and inquiries as to the weather came from the little rooms all round the courtyard, but no one came to a window to look; getting up was an agony to be postponed to the last moment.

Lucy decided to dress and go out into the dew-grey morning, so cool and damp and beneficent. She would go and see how the buttercups looked without the sun on them. Wet gamboge, probably. She washed sketchily, dressed in the warmest things she had with her, and slinging a coat over her shoulders went out into the silent corridor and down the deserted stairs. She paused by the quadrangle door to read the notices on the students' board; cryptic, esoteric, and plain. "Students are reminded that parents and visitors may be shown over the bedroom wings and the clinic, but not the front of the house." "Juniors are reminded that it is their duty to wait on the guests at tea and so help the domestic staff." And, by itself, in capitals, the simple statement:

DIPLOMAS WILL BE PRESENTED ON TUESDAY MORNING AT 9 O'CLOCK

As she moved on towards the covered way, Lucy visualised the diploma as an imposing roll of parchment tied up with ribbon, and then remembered that even in the matter of diplomas this place was a law unto itself. Their diploma was a badge to stick in their coat; a little enamel-and-silver affair that, pinned to the left breast of their working garment, would tell all and sundry where they had spent their student years and to what end.

Lucy came out into the covered way and dawdled along it to the gymnasium. Giddy had long since finished his cleaning operations- she had seen him from her window before she left her room contemplating his roses at the far side of the lawn-and it was apparent that Rouse had already performed her morning routine-the faint damp marks of her gym. shoes were visible on the concrete path-so the gymnasium was deserted. Lucy paused as she was about to turn along the path by its side wall, and stepped in at the wide-open door. Just as a race-course is more dramatic before the crowds blur it or an arena before its traffic writes scribbles over it, so the great waiting hall had a fascination for her. The emptiness, the quiet, the green subaqueous light, gave it a dignity and a mysteriousness that did not belong to its daytime personality. The single boom that Rouse used swam in the shadows, and the liquid light of the mirrors under the gallery wavered at the far end in vague repetition.

Lucy longed to shout a command so as to hear her voice in this empty space; or to climb a rib-stall and see if she could do it without having heart-failure; but she contented herself with gazing. At her age gazing was enough; and it was a thing that she was good at

Something winked on the floor half way between her and the boom; something tiny and bright. A nail-head or something, she thought; and then remembered that there were no nail-heads in a gymnasium floor. She moved forward, idly curious, and picked the thing up. It was a small filigree rosette, flat, and made of silvery metal; and as she put it absently into her jersey pocket and turned away to continue her walk, she smiled. If the quiver under her sternum this morning had reminded her of school days, that small metal circle brought back even more clearly the parties of her childhood. Almost before her conscious mind had recognised it for what it was she was back in the atmosphere of crackers-and-jellies and white silk frocks, and was wearing on her feet a pair of bronze leather pumps with elastic that criss-crossed over the ankle and a tiny silver filigree rosette on each toe. Going down the path to the field gate, she took it out again and smiled over it, remembering. She had quite forgotten those bronze pumps; there were black ones too, but all the best people wore bronze ones. She wondered who in College possessed a pair. College wore ballet shoes for dancing, with or without blocked toes; and their gymnasium shoes were welted leather with an elastic instep. She had never seen anyone wear those pumps with the little ornament at the toe.

Perhaps Rouse used them for running down to the gymnasium in the mornings. It was certainly this morning the ornament had been dropped, since The Abhorrence under Giddy's direction was guaranteed to abstract from the gymnasium everything that was not

nailed down.

She hung over the gate for a little but it was chilly there and disappointing; the trees were invisible in the mist, the buttercups a mere rust on the grey meadow, and the may hedges looked like dirty snow. She did not want to go back to the house before breakfast, so she walked along to the tennis courts where the Juniors were mending nets-this was odd-job day for everyone, they said, this being the one day in the year when they conserved their energies against a greater demand to come-and with them she stayed, talking and lending a hand, until they went up to College for breakfast. When they marvelled at her early rising little Miss Morris had suggested that she was tired of cold toast in her room, but when she said frankly that she could not sleep for excitement they were gratified by so proper an emotion in an alien breast, and promised that the reality would beggar expectation. She had not seen anything yet, it seemed.

She changed her wet shoes, suffered the friendly gibes of the assembled Staff at her access of energy, and went down with them to breakfast.

It was when she turned to see how Innes was looking this morning that she became aware of a gap in the pattern of bright heads. She did not know the pattern well enough to know who was missing, but there was certainly an empty place at one of the tables. She wondered if Henrietta knew. Henrietta had cast the usual critical eye over the assembly as she sat down, but as the assembly was also at that moment in the act of sitting down the pattern was blurred and any gap not immediately visible.

Hastily, in case Henrietta did not in fact know about that gap, she withdrew her gaze without further investigation. It was none of her wish to call down retribution on the head of any student, however delinquent. Perhaps, of course, someone had just "gone sick"; which would account for the lack of remark where their absence was concerned.

Miss Hodge, having wolfed her fish-cake, laid down her fork and swept the students with her small elephant eye. "Miss Wragg," she said, "ask Miss Nash to speak to me."

Nash got up from her place at the head of the nearest table and presented herself.

"Is it Miss Rouse who is missing from Miss Stewart's table?"

"Yes, Miss Hodge,"

"Why has she not come to breakfast?"

"I don't know, Miss Hodge."

"Send one of the Juniors to her room to ask why she is not here."

"Yes, Miss Hodge."

A stolid amiable Junior called Tuttle, who was always having to take the can back, was sent on the mission, and came back to say that Rouse was not in her room; which report Beau bore to the head table.

"Where was Miss Rouse when you saw her last?"

"I can't remember actually seeing her at all, Miss Hodge. We were all over the place this morning doing different things. It wasn't like sitting in class or being in the gym."

"Does anyone," said Henrietta addressing the students as a whole, "know where Miss Rouse is?"

But no one did, apparently.

"Has anyone seen her this morning?"

But no one, now they came to think of it, had seen her.

Henrietta, who had put away two slices of toast while Tuttle was upstairs, said: "Very well, Miss Nash," and Beau went back to her breakfast. Henrietta rolled up her napkin and caught Froken's eye, but Froken was already rising from table, her face anxious.

"You and I will go to the gymnasium, Froken," Henrietta said, and they went out together, the rest of the Staff trailing after them but not following them out to the gymnasium. It was only on the way upstairs to make her bed that it occurred to Lucy to think: "I could have told them that she wasn't in the gymnasium. How silly of me not to think of it." She tidied her room-a task that the students were expected to perform for themselves and which she thought it only fair that she likewise should do for herself- wondering all the time where Rouse could have disappeared to. And why. Could she suddenly have failed again this morning to do that simple boom exercise and been overtaken by a *crise des nerfs*? That was the only explanation that would fit the odd fact of any College student missing a meal; especially breakfast.

She crossed into the "old house" and went down the front stairs and out into the garden. From the office came Henrietta's voice talking rapidly to someone on the telephone, so she did not interrupt her. There was still more than half an hour before Prayers; she would spend it reading her mail in the garden, where the mist was rapidly lifting and a shimmer had come into the atmosphere that had been so dead a grey. She went to her favourite seat at the far edge of the garden overlooking the countryside, and it was not until nine o'clock that she came back. There was no doubt about the weather now: it was going to be a lovely day; Henrietta's «tragedy» was not going to happen.

As she came round the corner of the house an ambulance drove away from the front door down the avenue. She looked at it, puzzled; but decided that in a place like this an ambulance was not the thing of dread that it was to the ordinary civilian. Something to do with the clinic, probably.

In the drawing-room, instead of the full Staff muster demanded by two minutes to nine o'clock, there was only Miss Lux.

"Has Rouse turned up?" Lucy asked.

"Yes."

"Where was she?"

"In the gymnasium, with a fractured skull."

Even in that moment of shock Lucy thought how typical of Lux that succinct sentence was. "But how? What happened?"

"The pin that holds up the boom wasn't properly in. When she jumped up to it it came down on her head."

"Good heavens!" Lucy could feel that inert log crash down on her own skull; she had always hated the boom.

"Froken has just gone away with her in the ambulance to West Larborough."

"That was smart work."

"Yes. West Larborough is not far, and luckily at this hour of the morning the ambulance hadn't gone out, and once it was on the way

here there was no traffic to hold it up."

"What dreadful luck for everyone. On Demonstration Day."

"Yes. We tried to keep it from the students but that was hopeless, of course. So all we can do is to minimise it."

"How bad is it, do you think?"

"No one knows. Miss Hodge has wired to her people."

"Weren't they coming to the Dem.?"

"Apparently not. She has no parents; just an aunt and uncle who brought her up. Come to think of it," she added after a moment's silence, "that is what she looked like: a stray." She did not seem to notice that she had used the past tense.

"I suppose it was Rouse's own fault?" Lucy asked.

"Or the student who helped her put up the thing last night."

"Who was that?"

"O'Donnell, it seems. Miss Hodge has sent for her to ask her about it."

At that moment Henrietta herself came in, and all the vague resentments that Lucy had been nursing against her friend in the last few days melted at sight of Henrietta's face. She looked ten years older, and in some odd fashion at least a stone less heavy.

"They have a telephone, it seems," she said, continuing the subject that was the only one in her mind, "so I shall be able to talk to them perhaps before the telegram reaches them. They are getting the trunk call for me now. They should be here before night. I want to be available for the telephone call, so will you take Prayers, Miss Lux. Froken will not be back in time." Froken was, as Senior Gymnast, second in rank to Miss Hodge. "Miss Wragg may not be at Prayers; she is getting the gymnasium put to rights. But Madame will be there, and Lucy will back you up."

"But of course," said Lucy. "I wish there was something more that I could do."

There was a tap at the door, and O'Donnell appeared.

"Miss Hodge? You wanted to see me?"

"Oh, in my office, Miss O'Donnell."

"You weren't there, so I-"

"Not that it matters, now that you are here. Tell me: when you put up the boom with Miss Rouse last night-It was you who helped her?"

"Yes, Miss Hodge."

"When you put up the boom with her, which end did you take?"

There was a tense moment of silence. It was obvious that O'Donnell did not know which end of the boom had given way and that what she said in the next few seconds would either damn her or save her. But when she spoke it was with a sort of despairing resolution that stamped what she said with truth.

"The wall end, Miss Hodge."

"You put the pin into the upright that is fixed to the wall?"

'Yes.'

"And Miss Rouse took care of the upright in the middle of the floor."

"Yes, Miss Hodge."

"You have no doubt as to which end you attended to?"

"No, none at all."

"Why are you so certain?"

"Because I always did do the end by the wall."

"Why was that?"

"Rouse is taller than I am and could shove the boom higher than I could. So I always took the end by the wall so that I could put a foot in the rib-stalls when I was putting the pin in."

"I see. Very well. Thank you, Miss O'Donnell, for being so frank."

O'Donnell turned to go, and then turned back.

"Which end came down, Miss Hodge?"

"The middle end," Miss Hodge said, looking with something like affection on the girl, though she had been on the point of letting her go without putting her out of suspense.

A great wave of colour rushed into O'Donnell's normally pale face. "Oh, thank you!" she said, in a whisper, and almost ran out of the room.

"Poor wretch," said Lux. "That was a horrible moment for her."

"It is most unlike Miss Rouse to be careless about apparatus," Henrietta said thoughtfully.

"You are not suggesting that O'Donnell is not telling the truth?"

"No, no. What she said was obviously true. It was the natural thing for her to take the wall end where she would have the help of the rib-stalls. But I still cannot see how it happened. Apart from Miss Rouse's natural carefulness, a pin would have to be very badly put in indeed for it to be so far *not* in that it let the boom come down. And the hoisting rope so slack that it let the boom fall nearly three feet!"

v "I suppose Giddy couldn't have done something to it accidentally?"

"I don't know what he could have done to it. You can't alter a pin put in at that height without stretching up deliberately to it. It is not as if it were something he might possibly touch with his apparatus. And much as he prides himself on the strength of The Abhorrence there is no suction that will pull a pin out from under a boom."

"No." Lux thought a little. "Vibration is the only kind of force that would alter a pin's position. Some kind of tremor. And there was nothing like that."

"Not inside the gymnasium, certainly. Miss Rouse locked it as usual last night and gave the key to Giddy, and he unlocked it just

after first bell this morning."

"Then there is no alternative to the theory that for once Rouse was too casual. She was the last to leave the place and the first to come back to it-you wouldn't get anyone there at that hour of the morning who wasn't under the direct compulsion-so the blame is Rouse's. And let us be thankful for it. It is bad enough as it is, but it would be far worse if someone else had been careless and had to bear the knowledge that she was responsible for-"

The bell rang for Prayers, and downstairs the telephone shrilled in its own hysterical manner.

"Have you marked the place in the Prayer book?" Lux asked.

"Where the blue ribbon is," Miss Hodge said, and hurried out to the telephone.

"Has Froken not come back?" asked Madame, appearing in the doorway. "Ah, well, let us proceed. Life must go on, if I may coin a phrase. And let us hope that this morning's ration of uplift is not too apposite. Holy Writ has a horrible habit of being apposite."

Not for the first time, Lucy wished Madame Lefevre on a lonely island off Australia.

It was a silent and subdued gathering that awaited them, and Prayers proceeded in an atmosphere of despondency that was foreign and unprecedented. But with the hymn they recovered a little. It was Blake's and had a fine martial swing, and they sang it with a will. So did Lucy.

"Nor shall the sword sleep in my hand," she sang, making the most of it. And stopped suddenly, hit in the wind.

Hit in the wind by a jolt that left her speechless.

She had just remembered something. She had just remembered why she had been so sure that Rouse would not be found in the gymnasium. Rouse's damp footprints had been visible on the concrete path, and so she had taken it for granted that Rouse had already been and gone. But Rouse had not been. Rouse had come later, and had sprung to the insecure boom and had lain there until after breakfast when she was searched for.

Then-whose footprints were they?

"Students," said Miss Hodge, rising in her place after lunch and motioning the rest of the Staff to remain seated, "you are all aware of the unfortunate accident which occurred this morning- entirely through the carelessness of the student concerned. The first thing a gymnast learns is to examine apparatus before she uses it. That a student as responsible and altogether admirable as Miss Rouse should have failed in so simple and fundamental a duty is a warning to you all. That is one point. This is the other. This afternoon we are entertaining guests. There is no secret about what happened this morning-we could not keep it secret even if we wanted to-but I do ask you not to make it a subject of conversation. Our guests are coming here to enjoy themselves; and to know that this morning an accident took place sufficiently serious to send one of our students to hospital would undoubtedly take the edge off their pleasure; if indeed it did not fill them with a quite unnecessary apprehension when watching gymnastics. So if any of you have a desire to dramatise today's happenings, please curb it. It is your business to see that your guests go away happy, without reservations or regrets. I leave the matter to your own good sense."

It had been a morning of adjustment; physical, mental, and spiritual. Froken had come back from the West Larborough hospital to put a worried lot of Seniors through a routine that would allow for the fact that they were one short. Under her robust calm they took the alterations, and necessity for them, with a fair degree of equanimity; although she reported that at least a third of them shied like nervous colts each time they handled the right-hand front boom, or passed the place where it had fallen. It was going to be a miracle, Froken said with resignation, if they got through this afternoon's performance without someone or other making a fool of themselves. As soon as Froken had released them Madame Lefevre took them over for a much lengthier session. Thanks to her physical prowess, Rouse had been part of almost every item on the ballet programme; which meant that almost every item had to undergo either patching or reconstruction. This thankless and wearisome business had lasted until nearly lunch-time, and the echoes of it were still audible. Most of the lunch-table conversation appeared to consist of remarks like: "Is it you I give my right hand to when Stewart passes in front of me?" and Dakers lightened the universal anxiety by being overtaken by one of those sudden silences common to all gatherings, which left her announcing loudly that my *dears*, the last hour had *proved* that one could be in two places at the same time.

The most fundamental adjustment, however, occurred when both Froken and Madame had finished their respective revisions. It was then that Miss Hodge had sent for Innes and offered her Rouse's place at Arlinghurst. Hospital had confirmed Froken's diagnosis of a fracture, and there was no chance that Rouse would be able for work until many months had passed. How Innes had taken this no one knew; all that anyone knew was that she had accepted. The appointment, having all the qualities of anti-climax and being overshadowed by an authentic sensation, was taken as a matter of course; and as far as Lucy could see neither Staff nor students gave it a thought. Madame's sardonic: "The Deity disposes," was the solitary comment.

But Lucy was less happy about it. A vague uneasy stirring plagued her like some mental indigestion. The patness of the thing worried her. The accident had happened not only opportunely but at the last available moment. Tomorrow there would have been no need for Rouse to go to the gymnasium and practise; there would have been no boom set up and no pin to be insecurely placed. And there were those damp foot-marks in the early morning. If they were not Rouse's own, whose were they? As Lux had very truly observed, no one could be dragged anywhere near the gymnasium at that hour by anything less compelling than wild horses.

It was possible that they were Rouse's prints and that she had done something else before going into the gymnasium for her few minutes on the boom. Lucy could not swear that the footprints actually went into the building; she could remember no actual print on either of the two steps. She had merely seen the damp marks on the covered way and concluded, without thinking about it at all, that Rouse was ahead of her. The prints may have continued round the building, for all she knew. They may have had nothing to do with the gymnasium at all. Nothing to do with the students, even. It was possible that those heelless impressions, so vague and blurred, were made by a maid-servant's early-morning shoes.

All that was possible. But allied to the steps that were not likely to be Rouse's was the oddity of a small metal ornament lying on a floor that had been swept twenty minutes before by a powerful vacuum-cleaner. An ornament lying directly between the door and the waiting boom. And whatever was conjecture, one thing was certain: the ornament was not lost by Rouse. Not only had she almost certainly not been in the gymnasium this morning before Lucy entered it, but she did not possess a pair of pumps. Lucy knew, because one of her helpful chores today had been to pack poor Rouse's things. Miss Joliffe, whose task it would nominally have been, was overwhelmed by preparations for the afternoon's entertainment, and had passed the duty on to Wragg. Wragg had no student to enlist as substitute, since they were all busy with Madame, and it was not a duty that could be entrusted to a Junior. So Lucy had willingly taken over the job, glad to find a way to be of use. And her first action in Number Fourteen had been to take Rouse's shoes out of the cupboard and look at them. The only pair that were not there were her gymnastic shoes, which presumably had been what she wore this morning. But to be sure she summoned O'Donnell when she heard the Seniors come back from the gymnasium and said: "You know Miss Rouse very well, don't you? Would you cast your eye over these shoes and tell me whether they are all she had, before I begin packing them."

O'Donnell considered, and said yes, these were all. "Except her gym. shoes," she added. "She was wearing those."

That seemed to settle it.

"Nothing away being cleaned?"

"No, we clean our own-except for our hockey boots in winter."

Well, that seemed to be that. What Rouse had worn this morning were regulation College gym. shoes. It was not off any shoes of Rouse's that the little filigree rosette had come.

Then from where? Lucy asked herself as she packed Rouse's belongings with a care she never accorded her own. From where? She was still asking herself that as she changed her dress for the party. She put the rosette into one of the small drawers of the

dressing-table-desk affair, and dully looked over her scanty collection of clothes for something that would be suitable to a garden-party afternoon. From her second window, the one looking out on the garden, she could see the Juniors busy with small tables and basket-chairs and tea-umbrellas. Their ant-like running about was producing a gay border of colour round three sides of the lawn. The sun streamed down on them, and the picture in its definition and variety of detail was like a Brueghel gone suddenly gay.

But Lucy, looking down at the picture and remembering how she had looked forward to this occasion, felt sick at heart; and could not bring herself yet to acknowledge why she should be heartsick. Only one thing was clear to her. Tonight she must go to Henrietta with the little rosette. When all the excitement was over and Henrietta had time to be quiet and consider, then the problem-if there was a problem-must be handed over to her. She, Lucy, had been wrong last time when she had tried to save Henrietta suffering by dropping the little red book into the water; this time she must do her duty. The rosette was no concern of hers.

No. It was no concern of hers. Certainly not.

She decided that the blue linen with the narrow red belt was sufficiently Hanover Square to satisfy the most critical of parents from the provinces, brushed the suede shoes with the brush so dutifully included by Mrs Montmorency, and went down to help wherever she could be useful.

By two o'clock the first guests were arriving; going into the office to pay their respects to Miss Hodge, and then being claimed by excited offspring. Fathers prodded doubtfully at odd gadgets in the clinic, mothers prodded the beds in the wing, and horticultural uncles prodded Giddy's roses in the garden. She tried to find distraction in «pairing» the parents she met with the appropriate student. She noticed that she was searching unconsciously for Mr and Mrs Innes and anticipating their meeting with something that was half dread. Why dread? she asked herself. There was nothing in the world to dread, was there? Certainly not. Everything was lovely. Innes had after all got Arlinghurst; the day was after all a triumph for her.

She came on them unexpectedly, round the corner of the sweet-pea hedge; Innes walking between them with her arms through theirs and a light on her face. It was not the radiance that had shone in her eyes a week ago, but it was a good enough substitute. She looked worn but at peace; as if some inner battle was over, the issue settled for good or bad.

"You knew them," she said to Miss Pym, indicating her parents, "and you never told me."

It was like meeting old friends, Lucy thought. It was unbelievable that her only traffic with these people had been across a coffee table for an hour on a summer morning. She seemed to have known them all her life. And she felt that they in their turn felt like that about her. They really were glad to see her again. They remembered things and asked about them, referred to things she had said, and generally behaved as if she not only was of importance in their scheme of things, but was actually part of that scheme. And Lucy, used to the gushing indifference of literary parties, felt her heart warm afresh to them.

Innes left them together and went away to get ready for the gymnastic display that would open the afternoon's programme, and Lucy walked over to the gymnasium with them.

"Mary is looking very ill," her mother said. "Is there anything wrong?"

Lucy hesitated, wondering how much Innes had told them.

"She has told us about the accident, and about falling heir to Arlinghurst. I don't suppose she is very happy at profiting by another student's bad luck, but it can't be just that."

Lucy thought that the more they understood about the affair the better it would be if-well, the better it would be anyhow.

"Everyone took it for granted that she would get the appointment in the first place. I think it was a shock to her when she didn't."

"I see. Yes," said Mrs Innes, slowly; and Lucy felt that more explanation was not necessary; the whole tale of Innes's suffering and fortitude was clear to her mother in that moment.

"I think she might not approve of my having told you that, so-"

"No, we will not mention it," said Innes's mother. "How lovely the garden is looking. Gervase and I struggle along with our patch but only his bits look like the illustration; mine always turn out to be something else. Just look at those little yellow roses."

And so they came to the gymnasium door, and Lucy showed them up the stairs and introduced them to The Abhorrence-with pricking thought of a little metal rosette-and they found their seats in the gallery, and the afternoon had begun.

Lucy had a seat at the end of the front row. From there she looked down with affection on the grave young faces waiting, with such tense resolution, Froken's word of command. "Don't worry," she had heard a Senior say, "Froken will see us through," and one could see the faith in their eyes. This was their ordeal, and they came to it shaken, but Froken would see them through.

She understood now the love that had filled Henrietta's eyes when she had watched with her on that other occasion. Less than a fortnight ago, that was, and already she had a proprietorial interest and pride in them. When the autumn came the very map of England would look different to her because of these two weeks at Leys. Manchester would be the place where the Disciples were, Aberystwyth the place where Thomas was trying to stay awake, Ling the place where Dakers was being good with the babies, and so on. If she felt like that about them after a matter of days, it was not much wonder that Henrietta, who had seen them come untried into their new life, had watched them grow and improve, struggle, fail, and succeed, not much wonder that she looked on them as daughters. Successful daughters.

They had got through their preliminaries, and a little of the strain had gone from their faces; they were beginning to settle down. The applause that marked the end of their free-standing work broke the silence and warmed them and made the affair more human.

"What a charming collection," said a dowager with lorgnettes who was sitting next her (now who owned that? she couldn't be a parent) and turning to her confidentially asked: "Tell me, are they hand-picked?"

"I don't understand," murmured Lucy.

"I mean, are these all the Seniors there are?"

"You mean, are these just the best? Oh, no; that is the whole set."

"Really? Quite wonderful. So attractive, too. Quite amazingly attractive."

Did she think we had given the spotty ones half a crown to take themselves off for the afternoon, wondered Lucy.

But of course the dowager was right. Except for a string of two-year-olds in training, Lucy could think of nothing more attractive to mind and eye than that set of burnished and controlled young creatures busy dragging out the booms below her. The ropes rushed

down from their looped position near the roof, the window-ladder came to vertical, and over all three pieces of apparatus the Seniors swarmed in easy mastery. The applause as they put ropes and ladder away and turned the booms for balance was real and loud; the spectacular had its appeal.

Very different the place looked from that mysterious vault of greenish shadows that she had visited this morning. It was golden, and matter-of-fact, and alive; the reflected light from the sunlit roof showering down on the pale wood and making it glow. Seeing once more in her mind's eye that dim empty space with the single waiting boom, she turned to see whose lot it might be to perform her balance on the spot where Rouse had been found. Who had the inner end of the right-hand front boom?

It was Innes

"Go!" said Froken; and eight young bodies somersaulted up on to the high booms. They sat there for a moment, and then rose in unison to a standing position, one foot in front of the other, facing each other in pairs at opposite ends of each boom.

Lucy hoped frantically that Innes was not going to faint. She was not merely pale; she was green. Her opposite number, Stewart, made a tentative beginning, but, seeing that Innes was not ready, waited for her. But Innes stood motionless, apparently unable to move a muscle. Stewart cast her a glance of wild appeal. Innes remained paralysed. Some wordless message passed between them, and Stewart went on with her exercise; achieving a perfection very commendable in the circumstances. All Innes's faculties were concentrated on keeping her standing position on the boom long enough to be able to return to the floor with the rest, and not to ruin the whole exercise by collapsing, or by jumping off. The dead silence and the concentration of interest made her failure painfully obvious; and puzzled sympathy settled on her as she stood there. Poor dear, they thought, she was feeling ill. Excitement, no doubt. Positively green, she was. Poor dear, poor dear.

Stewart had finished, and now waited, looking at Innes. Slowly they sank together to the boom, and sat down on it; turned together to lean face-forward on it; and somersaulted forward on to the ground.

And a great burst of applause greeted them. As always, the English were moved by a gallant failure where an easy success left them merely polite. They were expressing at once their sympathy and their admiration. They had understood the strength of purpose that had kept her on the boom, paralysed as she was.

But the sympathy had not touched Innes. Lucy doubted if she actually heard the applause. She was living in some tortured world of her own, far beyond the reach of human consolation. Lucy could hardly bear to look at her.

The bustle of the following items covered up her failure and put an end to drama. Innes took her place with the others and performed with mechanical perfection. When the final vaulting came, indeed, her performance was so remarkable that Lucy wondered if she were trying to break her neck publicly. The same idea, to judge by her expression, had crossed Froken's mind; but as long as what Innes did was controlled and perfect there was nothing she could do. And everything that Innes did, however breath-taking, was perfect and controlled. Because she seemed not to care, the wildest flights were possible to her. And when the students had finished their final go-as-you-please and stood breathless and beaming, a single file on an empty floor as they had begun, their guests stood up as one man and cheered.

Lucy, being at the end of the row and next the door, was first to leave the hall, and so was in time to see Innes's apology to Froken. Froken paused, and then moved on as if not interested, or not willing to listen.

But as she went she lifted a casual arm and gave Innes a light friendly pat on the shoulder.

As the guests moved out to the garden and the basket-chairs round the lawn, Lucy went with them, and while she was waiting to see if sufficient chairs had been provided before taking one for herself, she was seized upon by Beau, who said: "Miss Pym! There you are! I've been hunting for you. I want you to meet my people."

She turned to a couple who were just sitting down and said: "Look, I've found Miss Pym at last."

Beau's mother was a very lovely woman; as lovely as the best beauty parlours and the most expensive hairdressers could make herand they had good foundation to work on since when Mrs Nash was twenty she must have looked very like Beau. Even now, in the
bright sunlight, she looked no older than thirty-five. She had a good dressmaker too, and bore herself with the easy friendly confidence
of a woman who has been a beauty all her life; so used to the effect she had on people that she did not have to consider it at all and so
her mind was free to devote itself to the person she happened to be meeting.

Mr Nash was obviously what is called an executive. A fine clear skin, a good tailor, a well-soaped look, and a general aura of mahogany tables with rows of clean blotters round them.

"I should be changing. I must fly," said Beau, and disappeared.

As they sat down together Mrs Nash looked quizzically at Lucy and said: "Well, now that you are here in the flesh, Miss Pym, we can ask you something we are dying to know. We want to know *how you do it?*"

"Do what?"

"Impress Pamela."

"Yes," said Mr Nash, "that is just what we should like to know. All our lives we have been trying to make some impression on Pamela, but we remain just a couple of dear people who happen to be responsible for her existence and have to be humoured now and then."

"Now you, it seems, are quite literally something to write home about," Mrs Nash said, and raised an eyebrow and laughed.

"If it is any consolation to you," Lucy offered, "I am greatly impressed by your daughter."

"Pam *is* nice," her mother said. "We love her very much; but I wish we impressed her more. Until you turned up no one has made any impression on Pamela since a Nanny she had at the age of four."

"And that impression was a physical one," Mr Nash volunteered.

"Yes. The only time in her life that she was spanked."

"What happened?" Lucy asked.

"We had to get rid of the Nanny!"

"Didn't you approve of spanking?"

"Oh yes, but Pamela didn't."

"Pam engineered the first sit-down strike in history," Mr Nash said.

"She kept it up for seven days," Mrs Nash said. "Short of going on dressing and forcibly feeding her for the rest of her life, there was nothing to do but get rid of Nanny. A first-rate woman she was, too. We were devastated to lose her."

The music began, and in front of the high screen of the rhododendron thicket appeared the bright colours of the Junior's Swedish folk dresses. Folk-dancing had begun. Lucy sat back and thought, not of Beau's childish aberrations, but of Innes, and the way a black cloud of doubt and foreboding was making a mockery of the bright sunlight.

It was because her mind was so full of Innes that she was startled when she heard Mrs Nash say: "Mary, darling. There you are. How nice to see you again," and turned to see Innes behind them. She was wearing boy's things; the doublet and hose of the fifteenth century; and the hood that hid all her hair and fitted close round her face accentuated the bony structure that was so individual. Now that the eyes were shadowed and sunk a little in their always-deep sockets, the face had something it had not had before: a forbidding look. It was-what was the word? — a «fatal» face. Lucy remembered her very first impression that it was round faces like that that history was built.

"You have been overworking, Mary," Mr Nash said, eyeing her.

"They all have," Lucy said, to take their attention from her.

"Not Pamela," her mother said. "Pam has never worked hard in her life."

No. Everything had been served to Beau on a plate. It was miraculous that she had turned out so charming.

"Did you see me make a fool of myself on the boom?" Innes asked, in a pleasant conversational tone. This surprised Lucy, somehow; she had expected Innes to avoid the subject.

"My dear, we sweated for you," Mrs Nash said. "What happened? Did you turn dizzy?"

"No," said Beau, coming up behind them and slipping an arm into Innes's, "that is just Innes's way of stealing publicity. It is not inferior physical powers, but superior brains the girl has. None of us has the wit to think up a stunt like that."

Beau gave the arm she was holding a small reassuring squeeze. She too was in boy's clothes, and looked radiant; even the quenching of her bright hair had not diminished the glow and vivacity of her beauty.

"That is the last of the Junior's efforts-don't they look gay against that green background? — and now Innes and I and the rest of our put-upon set will entertain you with some English antics, and then you shall have tea to sustain you against the real dancing to come."

And they went away together.

"Ah, well," said Mrs Nash, watching her daughter go, "I suppose it is better than being seized with a desire to reform natives in Darkest Africa or something. But I wish she would have just stayed at home and been one's daughter."

Lucy thought that it was to Mrs Nash's credit that, looking as young as she did, she wanted a daughter at home.

"Pam was always mad on gym. and games," Mr Nash said. "There was no holding her. There never was any holding her, come to that."

"Miss Pym," said The Nut Tart, appearing at Lucy's elbow, "do you mind if Rick sits with you while I go through this rigmarole with the Seniors?" She indicated Gillespie, who was standing behind her clutching a chair, and wearing his habitual expression of grave amusement.

The wide flat hat planked slightly to the back of her head on top of her wimple-Wife of Bath fashion-gave her an air of innocent astonishment that was delightful. Lucy and Rick exchanged a glance of mutual appreciation, and he smiled at her as he sat down on her other side.

"Isn't she lovely in that get-up," he said, watching Desterro disappear behind the rhododendrons.

"I take it that a rigmarole doesn't count as dancing."

"Is she good?"

"I don't know. I have never seen her, but I understand she is."

"I've never even danced ballroom stuff with her. Odd, isn't it. I didn't even know she existed until last Easter. It maddens me to think she has been a whole year in England and I didn't know about it. Three months of odd moments isn't very long to make any effect on a person like Teresa."

"Do you want to make an effect?"

"Yes." The monosyllable was sufficient.

The Seniors, in the guise of the English Middle Ages, ran out on to the lawn, and conversation lapsed. Lucy tried to find distraction in identifying legs and in marvelling over the energy with which those legs ran about after an hour of strenuous exercise. She said to herself: "Look, you have to go to Henrietta with the little rosette tonight. All right. That is settled. There is nothing you can do, either about the going or the result of the going. So put it out of your mind. This is the afternoon you have been looking forward to. It is a lovely sunny day, and everyone is pleased to see you, and you should be having a grand time. So relax. Even if-if anything awful happens about the rosette, it has nothing to do with you. A fortnight ago you didn't know any of these people, and after you go away you will never see any of them again. It can't matter to you what happens or does not happen to them."

All of which excellent advice left her just where she was before. When she saw Miss Joliffe and the maids busy about the tea-table in the rear she was glad to get up and find some use for her hands and some occupation for her mind.

Rick, unexpectedly, came with her. "I'm a push-over for passing plates. It must be the gigolo in me."

Lucy said that he ought to be watching his lady-love's rigmaroles.

"It is the last dance. And if I know anything of my Teresa her appetite will take more appeasing than her vanity, considerable as it is."

He seemed to know his Teresa very well, Lucy thought.

"Are you worried about something, Miss Pym?"

The question took her by surprise.

"Why should you think that?"

"I don't know. I just got the impression. Is there anything I can do?"

Lucy remembered how on Sunday evening when she had nearly cried into the Bidlington rarebit he had known about her tiredness and tacitly helped her. She wished that she had met someone as understanding and as young and as beautiful as The Nut Tart's follower when she was twenty, instead of Alan and his Adam's apple and his holey socks.

"I have to do something that is right," she said slowly, "and I'm afraid of the consequences."

"Consequences to you?"

"No. To other people."

"Never mind; do it."

Miss Pym put plates of cakes on a tray. "You see, the proper thing is not necessarily the right thing. Or do I mean the opposite?"

"I'm not sure that I know what you mean at all."

"Well-there are those awful dilemmas about whom would you save. You know. If you knew that by saving a person from the top of a snow slide you would start an avalanche that would destroy a village, would you do it? That sort of thing."

"Of course I would do it."

"You would?"

"The avalanche might bury a village without killing a cat-shall I put some sandwiches on that tray? — so you would be one life to the good."

"You would always do the right thing, and let the consequences take care of themselves?"

"That's about it."

"It is certainly the simplest. In fact I think it's too simple."

"Unless you plan to play God, one has to take the simple way."

"Play God? You've got two lots of tongue sandwiches there, do you know?"

"Unless you are clever enough to 'see before and after' like the Deity, it's best to stick to rules. Wow! The music has stopped and here comes my young woman like a hunting leopard." He watched Desterro come with a smile in his eyes. "Isn't that hat a knock-out!" He looked down at Lucy for a moment. "Do the obvious right thing, Miss Pym, and let God dispose."

"Weren't you watching, Rick?" she heard Desterro ask, and then she and Rick and The Nut Tart were overwhelmed by a wave of Juniors come to do their duty and serve tea. Lucy extricated herself from the crush of white caps and Swedish embroidery, and found herself face to face with Edward Adrian, alone and looking forlorn.

"Miss Pym! You are just the person I wanted to see. Have you heard that-"

A Junior thrust a cup of tea into his hand, and he gave her one of his best smiles which she did not wait to see. At the same moment

little Miss Morris, faithful even in the throes of a Dem., came up with tea and a tray of cakes for Lucy.

"Let us sit down, shall we?" Lucy said.

"Have you heard of the frightful thing that has happened?"

"Yes. It isn't very often, I understand, that a serious accident happens. It is just bad luck that it should be Demonstration Day."

"Oh, the accident, yes. But do you know that Catherine says she can't come to Larborough tonight? This has upset things, she says. She must stay here. But that is absurd. Did you ever hear anything more absurd? If there has been some kind of upset that is all the more reason why she should be taken out of herself for a little. I have arranged everything. I even got special flowers for our table tonight. *And* a birthday cake. It's her birthday next Wednesday."

Lucy wondered if any other person within the bounds of Leys knew when Catherine Lux's birthday was.

Lucy did her best to sympathise, but said gently that she saw Miss Lux's point of view. After all, the girl was seriously injured, and it was all very worrying, and it would no doubt seem to her a little callous to go merrymaking in Larborough.

"But it isn't merrymaking! It is just a quiet supper with an old friend. I really can't see why because some student has had an accident she should desert an old friend. You talk to her, Miss Pym. You make her see reason."

Lucy said she would do her best but could offer no hope of success since she rather shared Miss Lux's ideas on the subject.

"You, too! Oh, my God!"

"I know it isn't reasonable. It's even absurd. But neither of us would be happy and the evening would be a disappointment and you don't want that to happen? Couldn't you have us tomorrow night instead?"

"No, I'm catching a train directly the evening performance is over. And of course, it being Saturday, I have a matinee. And anyhow, I'm playing Romeo at night and that wouldn't please Cath at all. It takes her all her time to stand me in *Richard III*. Oh dear, the whole thing is absurd."

"Cheer up," Lucy said. "It stops short of tragedy. You will be coming to Larborough again, and you can meet as often as you like now that you know she is here."

"I shall never get Catherine in that pliant mood again. Never. It was partly your doing, you know. She didn't want to appear too much of a Gorgon in front of you. She was even going to come to see me act. Something she has never done before. I'll never get her back to that point if she doesn't come tonight. Do persuade her, Miss Pym."

Lucy promised to try. "How are you enjoying your afternoon, apart from broken appointments?"

Mr Adrian was enjoying himself vastly, it appeared. He was not sure which to admire most: the students' good looks or their efficiency.

"They have charming manners, too. I have not been asked for an autograph once, all the afternoon."

Lucy looked to see if he was being ironic. But no; the remark was "straight." He really could not conceive any reason for the lack of autograph hunters other than that of good manners. Poor silly baby, she thought, walking all his life through a world he knew nothing about. She wondered if all actors were like that. Perambulating spheres of atmosphere with a little actor safely cocooned at the heart of each. How nice it must be, so cushioned and safe from harsh reality. They weren't really born at all; they were still floating in some pre-natal fluid.

"Who is the girl who fluffed at the balance exercise?"

Was she not going to get away from Innes for two minutes together?

"Her name is Mary Innes. Why?"

"What a wonderful face. Pure Borgia."

"Oh, no!" Lucy said, sharply.

"I've been wondering all the afternoon what she reminded me of. I think it is a portrait of a young man by Giorgione, but which of his young men I wouldn't know. I should have to see them again. Anyhow, it's a wonderful face, so delicate and so strong, so good and so bad. Quite fantastically beautiful. I can't imagine what anything so dramatic is doing at a girls' Physical Training College in the twentieth century."

Well, at least she had the consolation of knowing that someone else saw Innes as she did; exceptional, oddly fine, out of her century, and potentially tragic. She remembered that to Henrietta she was merely a tiresome girl who looked down her nose at people less well endowed with brains.

Lucy wondered what to offer Edward Adrian by way of distraction. She saw coming down the path a floppy satin bow-tie against a dazzling collar and recognized Mr Robb, the elocution master; the only member of the visiting Staff, apart from Dr Knight, that she knew. Mr Robb had been a dashing young actor forty years ago-the most brilliant Lancelot Gobbo of his generation, one understood-and she felt that to hoist Mr Adrian with his own petard would be rather pleasant. But being Lucy her heart softened at the thought of the wasted preparations he had made-the flowers, the cake, the plans for showing off-and she decided to be merciful. She saw O'Donnell, gazing from a discreet distance at her one-time hero, and she beckoned to her. Edward Adrian should have a real, authentic, dyed-in-the-wool fan to cheer him; and he need never know that she was the only one in College.

"Mr Adrian," she said, "this is Eileen O'Donnell, one of your most devoted admirers."

"Oh, Mr Adrian-" she heard O'Donnell begin.

And she left them to it.

19

When tea was over (and Lucy had been introduced to at least twenty different sets of parents) the drift back from the garden began, and Lucy overtook Miss Lux on the way to the house.

"I'm afraid that I am going to cry off tonight," she said. "I feel a migraine coming."

"That is a pity," Lux said without emotion. "I have cried off too."

"Oh, why?"

"I'm very tired, and upset about Rouse, and I don't feel like going junketing in town."

"You surprise me."

"I surprise you? In what way?"

"I never thought I should live to see Catherine Lux being dishonest with herself."

"Oh. And what am I fooling myself about?"

"If you have a look at your mind you'll find that that's not why you're staying at home."

"No? Why, then?"

"Because you get such pleasure out of telling Edward Adrian where he gets off."

"A deplorable expression."

"Descriptive, though. You simply jumped at the chance of being high and mighty with him, didn't you?"

"I own that breaking the engagement was no effort."

"And a little unkind?"

"A deplorable piece of self-indulgence by a shrew. That's what you're trying to say, isn't it?"

"He is looking forward so much to having you. I can't think why."

"Thanks. I can tell you why. So that he can cry all over me and tell me how he hates acting-which is the breath of life to him."

"Even if he bores you —»

"If! My God!"

"—you can surely put up with him for an hour or so, and not use Rouse's accident as a sort of ace from your sleeve."

"Are you trying to make an honest woman of me, Lucy Pym?"

"That is the general idea. I feel so sorry for him, being left-"

"My-good-woman," Lux said, stabbing a forefinger at Lucy with each word, "never be sorry for Edward Adrian. Women spend the best years of their lives being sorry for him, and end by being sorry for it. Of all the self-indulgent, self-deceiving —»

"But he has got a Johannisberger."

Lux stopped, and smiled at her.

"I could do with a drink, at that," she said reflectively.

She walked on a little.

"Are you really leaving Teddy high and dry?" she asked.

"Yes.'

"All right. You win. I was just being a beast. I'll go. And every time he trots out that line about: 'Oh, Catherine, how weary I am of this artificial life' I shall think with malice: That Pym woman got me into this."

"I can bear it," Lucy said. "Has anyone heard how Rouse is?"

"Miss Hodge has just been on the telephone. She is still unconscious."

Lucy, seeing Henrietta's head through the window of her office-it was known as the office but was in reality the little sitting-room to the left of the front door-went in to compliment her on the success of the afternoon and so take her mind for at least a moment or two off the thing that oppressed it, and Miss Lux walked on. Henrietta seemed glad to see her, and even glad to have repeated to her the platitudes she had been listening to all the afternoon, and Lucy stayed talking to her for some time; so that the gallery was almost filled again when she took her seat to watch the dancing.

Seeing Edward Adrian in one of the gangway seats she paused and said:

"Catherine is coming."

"And you?" he said, looking up.

"No, alas; I am having a migraine at six-thirty sharp."

Whereupon he said: "Miss Pym, I adore you," and kissed her hand.

His next-door neighbour looked startled, and someone behind tittered, but Lucy liked having her hand kissed. What was the good of putting rose-water and glycerine on every night if you didn't have a little return now and then?

She went back to her seat at the end of the front row, and found that the dowager with the lorgnettes had not waited for the dancing; the seat was empty. But just before the lights went down-the hall was curtained and artificially lit-Rick appeared from behind and said: "If you are not keeping that seat for anyone, may I sit there?"

And as he sat down the first dancers appeared.

After the fourth or fifth item Lucy was conscious of a slow disappointment. Used to the technical standards of international ballet, she had not allowed in her mind for the inevitable amateurism of dancing in this milieu. In everything she had seen the students do so far they had been the best of their line in the business; professionals. But it was obviously not possible to give to other subjects the time and energy that they did and still reach a high standard as dancers. Dancing was a whole-time job.

What they did was good, but it was uninspired. On the best amateur level, or a little above. So far the programme had consisted of

the national and period dances beloved of all dancing mistresses, and they had been performed with a conscientious accuracy that was admirable but not diverting. Perhaps the need for keeping their minds on the altered track took some of the spontaneity from their work. But on the whole Lucy thought that it was that neither training nor temperament was sufficient. Their audience too lacked spontaneity; the eagerness with which they had watched the gymnastics was lacking. Perhaps they had had too much tea; or perhaps it was that the cinema had brought to their remotest doors a standard of achievement that made them critical. Anyhow their applause was polite rather than enthusiastic.

A piece of Russian bravura roused them for a moment, and they waited hopefully for what might come next. The curtains parted to reveal Desterro, alone. Her arms raised above her head and one slim hip turned to the audience. She was wearing some sort of native dress from her own hemisphere, and the «spot» made the bright colours and the barbaric jewels glitter so that she looked like one of the brilliant birds from her Brazilian forests. Her little feet in their high-heeled shoes tapped impatiently under the full skirt. She began to dance; slowly, almost absent-mindedly, as if she were putting in time. Then it became evident that she was waiting for her lover and that he was late. What his lateness meant to her also became rapidly apparent. By this time the audience were sitting up. From some empty space she conjured a lover. One could almost see the hang-dog look on his swarthy face. She dealt with him: faithfully. By this time the audience were sitting on the edge of their seats. Then, having dealt with him, she began to show off to him; but did he not realise his luck in having a girl like her, a girl who had a waist, an eye, a hip, a mouth, an ankle, a total grace like hers? Was he a boor that he could not see? She therefore showed him; with a wit in every movement that brought smiles to every face in the audience. Lucy turned to look at them; in another minute they would be cooing. It was magic. By the time she began to relent and let her lover have a word in, they were her slaves. And when she walked away with that still invisible but undoubtedly subdued young man, they cheered like children at a Wild West matinee.

Watching her as she took her bow, Lucy remembered how The Nut Tart had chosen Leys because for the proper dancing schools "one must have a metier."

"She was modest about her dancing after all," she said aloud. "She could have been a professional."

"I am glad she didn't," Rick said. "Coming here she has learned to love the English countryside. If she had trained in town she would have met only the international riff-raff that hang around ballet."

And Lucy thought that he was probably right.

There was a distinct drop in temperature when the conscientious students reappeared to continue their numbers. Stewart had a Celtic verve that was refreshing, and Innes had grace and moments of fire, but the moment Desterro came among them even Lucy forgot Innes and all the others. Desterro was enchanting.

At the end she had an ovation all to herself.

And Miss Pym, catching the look on Rick's face, felt a small pang.

It was not enough to have one's hand kissed.

"Nobody told me that Desterro could dance like that," she said to Miss Wragg as they went over to supper together when the guests had at last taken their departure with much starting up of engines and shouted goodbyes.

"Oh, she is Madame's little pet," Wragg said in the unenthusiastic voice of Madame's follower speaking of a creature so far gone in sin that she did not play games. "I think she is stagey, myself. Out of place here, somehow. I honestly think that first dance wasn't quite nice. Did you think that?"

"I thought it delightful."

"Oh, well," Wragg said, resignedly; and added: "She must be good, or Madame wouldn't be so keen on her."

Supper was a quiet meal. Exhaustion, anti-climax, and the recollection (now that they were idle) of this morning's accident, all served to damp the students' spirits and clog their tongues. The Staff, too, were tired after their shocks, exertions, social efforts, and anxieties. Lucy felt that the occasion called for a glass of good wine, and thought with a passing regret of the Johannisberger that Lux was drinking at that moment. Her heart had begun to thud in a horrid way when she thought that in a few moments she must take that little rosette into the office, and tell Henrietta where she found it.

She had still not taken it out of the drawer where she had left it, and after supper she was on the way up to fetch it when she was overtaken by Beau, who slid an arm into hers and said:

"Miss Pym, we are brewing cocoa in the Common Room, the whole shoot of us. Do come and cheer us up. You don't want to go and sit in that morgue upstairs"-the morgue was presumably the drawing-room-"do you? Come and cheer us up."

"I don't feel particularly cheerful myself," Lucy said, thinking with loathing of the cocoa, "but if you put up with my gloom I shall put up with yours."

As they turned towards the Common Room a great wind out of nowhere swept down the corridor through all the wide-open windows, dashing the green branches of the trees outside against one another and tearing the leaves upward so that their backs showed. "The end of the good weather," Lucy said, pausing to listen. She had always hated that restless destroying wind that put paid to the golden times.

"Yes; it's cold too," Beau said. "We've lit a wood fire."

The Common Room was part of the "old house" and had an old brick fireplace; and it certainly looked cheerful with the flame and crackle of a freshly lit fire, the rattle of crockery, the bright dresses of the students lying about in exhausted heaps, and their still brighter bedroom slippers. It was not only O'Donnell who had had recourse to odd footwear tonight; practically everyone was wearing undress shoes of some sort or another. In fact Dakers was lying on a settee with her bare bandaged toes higher than her head. She waved a cheerful hand at Miss Pym, and indicated her feet.

"Haemostosis!" she said. "I bled into my best ballet shoes. I suppose no one would like to buy a pair of ballet shoes, slightly soiled? No, I was afraid not."

"There's a chair over by the fire, Miss Pym," Beau said, and went to pour out the cocoa. Innes, who was sitting curled up on the hearth superintending a Junior's efforts with a bellows, patted the chair and made her welcome in her usual unsmiling fashion.

"I've cadged the rest of the tea stuff from Miss Joliffe," Hasselt said, coming in with a large plate of mixed left-overs.

"How did you do that?" they asked. "Miss Joliffe never gives away even a smell."

"I promised to send her some peach jam when I got back to South Africa. There isn't really very much though it looks a plateful. The maids had most of it after tea. Hullo, Miss Pym. What did you think of us?"

"I thought you were all wonderful," Lucy said.

"Just like London policemen," Beau said. "Well, you bought that, Hasselt."

Lucy apologised for the cliche, and sought by going into further detail to convince them of her enthusiasm.

"Desterro ran away with the evening, didn't she, though?" they said; and glanced with friendly envy at the composed figure in the bright wrap sitting upright in the ingle-nook.

"Me, I do only one thing. It is easy to do just one thing well."

And Lucy, like the rest of them, could not decide if the cool little remark was meant to be humble or reproving. On the whole she thought humble.

"That's enough, March, it's going beautifully," Innes said to the Junior, and moved to take the bellows from her. As she moved her feet came out from under her and Lucy saw that she was wearing black pumps.

And the little metal ornament that should have been on the left one was not there.

Oh, no, said Lucy's mind. No. No. No.

"That is your cup, Miss Pym, and here is yours, Innes. Have a rather tired macaroon, Miss Pym."

"No, I have some chocolate biscuits for Miss Pym."

"No, she is going to have some Ayrshire shortbread, out of a tin, and fresh. None of your pawed-over victuals."

The babble went on round her. She took something off a plate. She answered what was said to her. She even took a sip of the stuff in the cup.

Oh, no. No.

Now that the thing was here-the thing she had been afraid of, so afraid that she would not even formulate it in her mind-now that it was here, made concrete and manifest, she was appalled. It had all suddenly become a nightmare: the bright noisy room with the blackening sky outside where the storm was rushing up, and the missing object. One of those nightmares where something small and irrelevant has a terrifying importance. Where something immediate and urgent must be done about it but one can't think what or why.

Presently she must get up and make polite leavetaking and go to Henrietta with her story and end by saying: "And I know whose shoe it came from. Mary Innes's."

Innes was sitting at her feet, not eating but drinking cocoa thirstily. She had curled her feet under her again, but Lucy had no need for further inspection. Even her faint hope that someone else might be wearing pumps had gone overboard. There was a fine colourful variety of footgear present but not a second pair of pumps.

In any case, no one else had a motive for being in the gymnasium at six o'clock this morning.

"Have some more cocoa," Innes said presently, turning to look at her. But Miss Pym had hardly touched hers.

"Then I must have some more," Innes said, and began to get up.

 $\label{thm:local_equation} A \ very \ tall \ thin \ Junior \ called \ Farthing, \ but \ known \ even \ to \ the \ Staff \ as \ Tuppence-Ha'penny, \ came \ in.$

"You're late, Tuppence," someone said. "Come and have a bun." But Farthing stood there, uncertainly.

"What is the matter, Tuppence?" they asked, puzzled by her shocked expression.

"I went to put the flowers in Froken's room," she said slowly.

"Don't tell us there were some there already?" someone said; and there was a general laugh.

"I heard the Staff talking about Rouse."

"Well, what about her? Is she better?"

"She's dead."

The cup Innes was holding crashed on the hearth. Beau crossed over to her to pick up the pieces.

"Oh, nonsense," they said. "You heard wrong, young Tuppence."

"No, I didn't. They were talking on the landing. She died half an hour ago."

This was succeeded by a dismayed silence.

"I *did* put up the wall end," O'Donnell said loudly, into the silence.

"Of course you did, Don," Stewart said, going to her. "We all know that."

Lucy put down her cup and thought that she had better go upstairs. They let her go with murmured regrets, their happy party in pieces round them.

Upstairs, Lucy found that Miss Hodge had gone to the hospital to receive Rouse's people when they arrived, and that it was she who had telephoned the news. Rouse's people had come, and had taken the blow unemotionally, it seemed.

"I never liked her, God forgive me," said Madame, stretched at full length on the hard sofa; her plea to the Deity for forgiveness had a genuine sound.

"Oh, she was all right," Wragg said, "quite nice when you knew her. And the most marvellous centre-half. This is frightful, isn't it! Now it will be a matter of inquiry, and we'll have police, an inquest, and appalling publicity, and everything."

Yes, police and everything.

She could not do anything about the little rosette tonight. And anyhow she wanted to think about it.

She wanted to get away by herself and think about it.

Bong! Bong! The clock in that far-away steeple struck again.

Two o'clock.

She lay staring into the dark, while the cold rain beat on the ground outside and wild gusts rose every now and then and rioted in anarchy, flinging her curtains out into the room so that they flapped like sails and everything was uncertainty and turmoil.

The rain wept with steady persistence, and her heart wept with it. And in her mind was a turmoil greater than the wind's.

"Do the obvious right thing, and let God dispose," Rick had said. And it had seemed a sensible ruling.

But that was when it had been a hypothetical affair of "causing grievous bodily harm" (that was the phrase, wasn't it?) and now it had ceased to be hypothesis and it wasn't any longer mere bodily harm. It was-was *this*.

It wouldn't be God who would dispose this, in spite of all the comforting tags. It would be the Law. Something written with ink in a statute book. And once that was invoked God Himself could not save a score of innocent persons being crushed under the juggernaut wheels of its progress.

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, said the old Mosaic law. And it sounded simple. It sounded just. One saw it against a desert background, as if it involved two people only. It was quite different when one put it in modern words and called it "being hanged by the neck until you are dead."

If she went to Henrietta in the —

If?

Oh, all right, of course she was going.

When she went to Henrietta in the morning, she would be putting in motion a power over which neither she nor anyone else had control; a power that once released would catch up this, that, and the next one from the innocent security of their peaceful lives and fling them into chaos.

She thought of Mrs Innes, happily asleep somewhere in Larborough; bound home tomorrow to wait for the return of the daughter in whom she had her life. But her daughter would not come home-ever.

Neither will Rouse, a voice pointed out.

No, of course not, and Innes must somehow pay for that. She must not be allowed to profit by her crime. But surely, surely there was some way in which payment could be made without making the innocent pay even more bitterly.

What was justice?

To break a woman's heart; to bring ruin and shame on Henrietta and the destruction of all she had built up; to rub out for ever the radiance of Beau, the Beau who was unconditioned to grief. Was that a life for a life? That was three-no, four lives for one.

And one not worth —

Oh, no. That she could not judge. For that one had to "see before and after," as Rick said. A curiously sober mind, Rick had, for a person with a play-boy's face and a Latin lover's charm.

There was Innes moving about again next-door. As far as Lucy knew she had not slept yet either. She was very quiet, but every now and then one heard a movement or the tap in her room ran. Lucy wondered whether the water was to satisfy a thirst or to cool temples that must be throbbing. If she, Lucy, was lying awake with her thoughts running round and round inside her skull like trapped mice, what must Innes be going through? Humourless she might be, unenamoured of the human species she probably was, but insensitive she most certainly was not. Whether it was thwarted ambition, or sheer anger and hate, that had driven her down to the gymnasium through the misty morning, she was not the sort to be able to do what she had done with impunity. It might well be, indeed, that given her temperament it was herself she had destroyed when she tampered with that boom. In the case-histories of crime there were instances of women so callous that they had come to a fresh blooming once the obstacle to their desires was out of the way. But they were not built like Mary Innes. Innes belonged to that other, and rarer, class who found too late that they could not live with themselves any more. The price they had paid was too high.

Perhaps Innes would provide her own punishment.

That, now she came to think of it, was how she had first thought of Innes, on that Sunday afternoon under the cedar. The stake or nothing. A self-destroyer.

That she had destroyed a life that stood in her way was almost incidental.

It had not, in any case, been intended as destruction; Lucy was quite sure of that. That is what made this business of starting the machine so repellent, so unthinkable. All that the insecure pin was meant to achieve was a temporary incapacity. An assurance that Rouse would not go to Arlinghurst in September-and that she would.

Had she had that in mind, Lucy wondered, when she refused the appointment at the Wycherley Orthopaedic Hospital? No, surely not. She was not a planner in cold blood. The thing had been done at the very last moment, in desperation.

At least, it had been *achieved* at the very last moment.

It was possible that its lateness was due to lack of previous opportunity. The way to the gymnasium might never have been clear before; or Rouse may have got there first.

"A Borgia face," Edward Adrian had said, delightedly.

And Teresa's great-grandmother's grandmother, whom she resembled, she had planned. And had lived a long, secure, and successful life as a widow, administering rich estates and bringing up a son, without apparently any signs of spiritual suicide.

The wind flung itself into the room, and Innes's window began to rattle. She heard Innes cross the room to it, and presently it stopped.

She wished she could go next-door, now, at this minute, and put her hand down. Show Innes the ace she held and didn't want to play. Together they could work something out.

Together? With the girl who loosened that pin under the boom?

No. With the girl she had talked to in the corridor last Saturday afternoon, so radiant, so full of dignity and wisdom. With the girl who could not sleep tonight. With her mother's daughter.

Whatever she had done, even if she had planned it, the result had been something she had neither planned nor foreseen. The result was catastrophe for her.

And who in the first place had brought that catastrophe?

Henrietta. Henrietta with her mule-like preference for her inferior favourite.

She wondered if Henrietta was sharing Innes's vigil. Henrietta who had come back from West Larborough so strangely thin and old-looking. As if the frame she was strung on had collapsed and the stuffing had shifted. Like a badly stuffed toy after a month in the nursery. That is what Henrietta had looked like.

She had been truly sorry for her friend, bereft of someone she had-loved? Yes, loved, she supposed. Only love could have blinded her to Rouse's defects. Bereft; and afraid for her beloved Leys. She had been truly moved by her suffering. But she could not help the thought that but for Henrietta's own action none of this would have happened.

The operative cause was Innes's vulnerability. But the button that had set the whole tragedy in motion was pressed by Henrietta.

And now she, Lucy, was waiting to press another button which would set in motion machinery even more monstrous. Machinery that would catch up in its gears and meshes, and maim and destroy, the innocent with the guilty. Henrietta perhaps had bought her punishment, but what had the Inneses done to have this horror unloaded on them? This unnameable horror.

Or *had* they contributed? How much had Innes's upbringing been responsible for her lack of resilience? Given that she had been born without "oil on her feathers," had they tried to condition her to the lack? Who could ever say where first causes lay?

Perhaps after all, even through the Law, it was the Deity who disposed. If you were a Christian you took that for granted, of course. You took for granted that nothing ever happened that there was no cause for. That everyone who would be tortured incidentally by Innes's trial for murder had in some way «bought» their punishment. It was a fine comfortable theory, and Lucy wished that she could subscribe to it. But she found it difficult to believe that any deficiency on the part of parents as responsible and as devoted as the Inneses could warrant the bringing down on their heads of a tragedy so unspeakable.

Or perhaps —

She sat up, to consider this new thought.

If God did dispose-as undoubtedly He did in the latter end-then perhaps the disposing was already at work. Had begun to work when it was she and not someone else who found the little rosette. It had not been found by a strong-minded person who would go straight to Henrietta with it as soon as she smelt a rat, and so set the machinery of man-made Law in motion. No. It had been found by a feeble waverer like herself, who could never see less than three sides to any question. Perhaps that made sense.

But she wished very heartily that the Deity had found another instrument. She had always hated responsibility; and a responsibility of this magnitude was something that she could not deal with at all. She wished that she could throw away the little rosette-toss it out of the window now and pretend that she had never seen it. But of course she could not do that. However rabbity and inadequate she was by nature, there was always her other half-the Laetitia half-which stood watching her with critical eyes. She could never get away from that other half of herself. It had sent her into fights with her knees knocking, it had made her speak when she wanted to hold her tongue, it had kept her from lying down when she was too tired to stand up. It would keep her from washing her hands now.

She got up and leaned out into the wet, lashing, noisy night. There was a puddle of rain water on the wood floor inside the window. The cold shock of it on her bare feet was somehow grateful; a physical and understandable discomfort. At least she did not have to mop it up, or wonder about a carpet. All the elements came into this place at their will and everyone took it for granted. One of Innes's few volunteered remarks had been how lovely it had been one morning to waken and find her pillow crusted with snow. That had happened only once, she said, but you could always tell the season by what you found on your pillow in the morning: spiders in the autumn and sycamore seeds in June.

She stayed so long cooling her burning head that her feet grew cold, and she had to wrap them in a jersey to warm them when she got back into bed. That completes it, she thought: cold feet mentally and physically. You're a poor thing, Lucy Pym.

About three o'clock when she was growing sleepy at last, she was shot wide awake by the realisation of what she was proposing to do. She was seriously considering keeping back evidence in a capital charge. Becoming an accessory after the fact. A criminal.

She, respectable, law-abiding Lucy Pym.

How had she got to that point? What could she have been thinking of?

Of course she had no choice in the matter at all. Who disposed or did not dispose was no concern of hers. This was a matter of public inquiry, and she had a duty to do. A duty to civilisation, to the State, to herself. Her private emotions had nothing to do with it. Her views on justice had nothing to do with it. However unequal and wrong-headed the Law might be, she could not suppress evidence.

How in the name of all that was crazy had she ever thought that she could?

Rick was right: she would do the obvious right thing, and let God dispose.

About half-past four she really did fall asleep.

The morning was bleary and sodden, and Lucy regarded it with distaste. The waking-bell had sounded as usual at five-thirty, although on the morning after the Demonstration there were no classes before breakfast. College might make concessions but it did not discard its habits. She tried to fall asleep again, but reality had come with the daylight, and what had been feverish theory in the dark hours was now chill fact. In an hour or two she would have pressed that button, and altered beyond computing lives of whose existence she was not even aware. Her heart began to thud again.

Oh, dear, why had she ever come to this place!

It was when she had finished dressing and was sticking a few invisible hairpins into appropriate places that she realised that she could not go to Henrietta about the rosette without first going to Innes. She was not sure whether this was a remnant of some childish conception of "playing fair" or whether she was just trying to find a way of breaking the matter that would make her own personal responsibility less absolute.

She went to Innes's door, quickly before the impulse to action should evaporate, and knocked. She had heard Innes come back from her bath and reckoned that by now she must be dressed.

The Innes who opened the door looked tired and heavy-eyed but composed. Now that she was face to face with her Lucy found it difficult to identify her with the Innes of her disturbed thoughts last night.

"Do you mind coming into my room for a moment?" she asked.

Innes hesitated, looked uncertain for a second, and then recovered herself. "Yes, of course," she said; and followed Lucy.

"What a night of rain it was," she said brightly.

It was unlike Innes to bother with remarks about the weather. And it was exceedingly unlike Innes to be bright.

Lucy took the little silver rosette out of her drawer and held it out on her palm for Innes to see.

"Do you know what that is?" she asked.

In a second the brightness had disappeared and Innes's face was hard and wary.

"Where did you get that?" she snapped.

It was only then that Lucy realised how, deep down, she had counted on Innes's reaction being different. How, unconsciously, she had expected Innes to say: "It looks like something off a dancing pump; lots of us have them." Her heart stopped thudding and sank into her stomach.

"I found it on the gymnasium floor very early yesterday morning," she said.

The hard wariness melted into a slow despair.

"And why do you show it to me?" Innes said dully.

"Because I understand that there is only one pair of those old-fashioned pumps in College."

There was silence. Lucy laid the little object down on the table and waited.

"Am I wrong?" she asked at last.

"No."

There was another silence.

"You don't understand, Miss Pym," she said in a burst, "it wasn't meant to be — . I know you'll think I'm just trying to white-wash it, but it was never meant to be-to be the way it turned out. It was because I was so sick about missing Arlinghurst-I practically lost my reason over that for a time-I behaved like an idiot. It got so that I couldn't think of anything in the world but Arlinghurst. And this was just to be a way of-of letting me have a second chance at it. It was never meant to be more than that. You must believe that. You must

"But of course I believe it. If I didn't I don't suppose I should be sharing the knowledge of this with you." She indicated the rosette. After a moment Innes said: "What are you going to do?"

"Oh, dear God, I don't know," said poor Lucy, helpless now that she was face to face with reality. All the crimes she had met with were in slick detective stories where the heroine, however questionable, was invariably innocent, or in case-histories where the crime was safely over with and put away and a matter only for the scalpel. All those subjects of case-history record had had friends and relations whose stunned disbelief must have been very like her own, but the knowledge was neither comfort nor guide to her. This was the kind of thing that happened to other people- happened daily if one could believe the Press-but could not possibly happen to oneself.

How *could* one believe that someone one had laughed and talked with, liked and admired, shared a communal life with, could be responsible for another's death?

She found herself beginning to tell Innes of her sleepless night, of her theories about "disposing," of her reluctance to destroy half a dozen lives because of one person's crime. She was too absorbed in her own problem to notice the dawning hope in Innes's eyes. It was only when she heard herself saying: "Of course you cannot possibly be allowed to profit by Rouse's death," that she realised how far she had already come along the road that she had had no intention of travelling.

But Innes pounced on this. "Oh, but I won't, Miss Pym. And it has nothing to do with your finding the little ornament. I knew last night when I heard that she was dead that I couldn't go to Arlinghurst. I was going to tell Miss Hodge this morning. I was awake too last night. Facing a lot of things. Not only my responsibility for Rouse's death-my inability to take defeat and like it. But-oh, well, a lot of things that wouldn't interest you." She paused a moment, considering Lucy. "Look, Miss Pym, if I were to spend the rest of my life atoning for yesterday morning will you-would you-" She could not put so brazen a suggestion into words, even after Lucy's dissertation on justice.

"Become an accessory after the fact?"

The cold legality of the phrase discouraged Innes.

"No. I suppose it is too much to expect anyone to do. But I *would* atone, you know. It wouldn't be any half-hearted affair. It would be my life for-hers. I would do it gladly."

"I believe you, of course. But how do you plan to atone?"

"I thought of that last night. I began with leper colonies and things like that, but they were rather unreal and didn't make much sense in connection with a Leys training. I have a better idea. I decided that I would work alongside my father. I hadn't planned to do medical work, but I am good at it and there is no orthopaedic clinic in our home town."

"It sounds admirable," Lucy said, "but where is the penance?"

"My one ambition since I was a little girl has been to get away from living in a little market town; coming to Leys was my passport to freedom."

"I see."

"Believe me, Miss Pym, it would be penance. But it wouldn't be a barren one. It wouldn't be just personal flagellation. I would be doing something useful with my life, something that would-would make it good value for exchange."

"Yes, I see."

There was another long silence.

The five-minute bell rang, but for the first time since she came to Leys Lucy was unconscious of a bell.

"Of course you have nothing but my word for it-"

"I would accept your word."

"Thank you."

It seemed too easy a way out, she was thinking. If Innes was to be punished, the living of a dull and useful life hardly seemed a sufficient exaction. She had forfeited Arlinghurst of course; that would cost her something. But would it pay for a death?

What, in any case, would pay for a death? Except a death.

And Innes was offering what she obviously considered a living death. Perhaps after all it was not so poor an exchange.

What she, Lucy, was faced with was the fact that all her deliberations, her self-communing and comparing of arguments, fused at this moment into one single and simple issue: Was she going to condemn to death the girl who was standing in front of her?

It was, after all, as simple as that. If she took that little rosette to Henrietta this morning, Innes would die before the first students came back to Leys in the autumn. If she did not die she would spend her twenties in a living death that would indeed be "barren."

Let her spend her years in the prison of her choice, where she could be useful to her fellows.

Certainly she, Lucy Pym, was quite unequal to the task of condemning her.

And that was that.

"I am entirely in your hands," she said slowly to Innes, "because I am quite incapable of sending anyone to the gallows. I know what my plain duty is and I can't do it." Odd, she thought, that I should be in her reverence rather than she in mine.

Innes stared at her, doubtfully.

"You mean — " Her tongue came out and ran along her dry lips. "You mean that you won't tell about the rosette?"

"No. I shall never tell anyone."

Innes went suddenly white.

So white that Lucy realised that this was a phenomenon that she had read about but never seen. "White as a sheet," they said. Well, it was perhaps an unbleached sheet but it certainly was "going white."

Innes put her hand out to the chair by the dressing-table and sat down abruptly. Seeing Lucy's anxious expression she said: "It's all right, I'm not going to faint. I've never fainted in my life. I'll be all right in a minute."

Lucy, who had been antagonised by her self-possession, her ready bargaining-Innes had been far too lucid on the subject, she felt-was seized with something like compunction. Innes had not after all been self-possessed. It had been the old story of emotion clamped down and taking a mean revenge when it found escape.

"Would you like a drink of water?" Lucy said, moving to the wash-basin.

"No, thank you, I'm all right. It's just that for the last twenty-four hours I've been so afraid, and seeing that silver thing on your hand was the last straw, and then suddenly it is all over, you've let me buy a reprieve, and-and —»

Sobs came up in her throat and choked the words. Great rending sobs without a single tear. She put her hands over her mouth to stop them, but they burst through and she covered her face and struggled for composure. It was no use. She put both arms on the desk with her head between them and sobbed her heart out.

And Lucy, looking at her, thought: Another girl would have begun with this. Would have used it as a weapon, a bid for my sympathy. But not Innes. Innes comes self-contained and aloof, offering hostages. Without the breakdown no one would have guessed that she was suffering. Her present abandonment was the measure of her previous torture.

The first low murmur of the gong began in a slow crescendo.

Innes heard it and struggled to her feet. "If you'll forgive me," she said, "I'll go and dash some cold water on myself. That will stop it."

Lucy thought it remarkable that a girl so racked with sobs that she could hardly speak should prescribe for herself with such detachment; as if she were another person from this hysterical individual who had taken possession of her and was making such an exhibition of herself.

"Yes, do," Lucy said.

Innes paused with her hand on the door-knob.

"Some day I'll be able to thank you properly," she said, and disappeared.

Lucy dropped the little silver rosette into her pocket and went down to breakfast.

It was a horrible weekend.

The rain poured down. Henrietta went about looking as though she had had a major operation that had not proved a success. Madame was at her worst and not at all helpful, either actually or verbally. Froken was furious that such a thing should have happened in «her» gymnasium. Wragg was an ever-present Cassandra scattering depressing truisms. Lux was quiet and tired.

Lux had come back from Larborough bearing a small pink candle wrapped in pale green tissue paper. "Teddy said I was to give you this," she said. "I can't think why."

"Oh? From a cake?"

"Yes. It's my birthday about now."

"How nice of him to remember."

"Oh, he keeps a birthday diary. It's part of his publicity. It is his secretary's duty to send telegrams to all the appropriate people on the appropriate days."

"Don't you ever give him credit for anything?" Lucy asked.

"Teddy? Not for a real emotion, I don't. I've known him since he was ten, don't forget. He can't fool me for more than five seconds together."

"My hairdresser," Lucy said, "who lectures to me while he is doing my hair, says that one should allow everyone three faults. If one makes that allowance, one finds that the rest is surprisingly nice, he says."

"When you allow for Teddy's three faults there is nothing left, unfortunately."

"Why?"

"Because his three faults are vanity, selfishness, and self-pity. And any one of the three is totally destructive."

"Whew!" said Lucy. "I give up."

But she stuck the silly little candle on her dressing-table, and thought kindly of Edward Adrian.

She wished she could think as kindly of her beloved Beau, who was making things as difficult as possible by being furious with Innes for giving up Arlinghurst. In fact Lucy understood that things had come as near a quarrel between them as was possible between two people so mutually devoted.

"Says she wouldn't be happy in dead men's shoes," said Beau, positively giving off sparks with wrath. "Can you imagine anything more ridiculous? Turning down Arlinghurst as if it were a cup of tea. After nearly dying of chagrin because she didn't get it in the first place. For God's sake, Miss Pym, you talk to her and make her see sense before it is too late. It isn't just Arlinghurst, it's her whole future. Beginning at Arlinghurst means beginning at the top. You talk to her, will you? Talk her out of this absurd notion!"

It seemed to Lucy that she was always being implored to "talk to" people. When she wasn't being a dose of soothing syrup she was being a shot of adrenalin, and when she wasn't being that she was being just a spoonful of alkaline powder for general consumption.

When she wasn't being a *deus ex machina*; a perverter of justice. But she tried not to think of that.

There was nothing she could say to Innes, of course, but other people had said it. Miss Hodge had wrought with her long and faithfully; dismayed by the defection of the girl she had not wanted to appoint in the first place. Now she had no one to send to Arlinghurst; she must write and tell them so and see the appointment go elsewhere. Perhaps when the news of the fatal accident leaked round the academic world Arlinghurst would decide to look elsewhere next time they wanted a gymnast. Accidents shouldn't happen in well conducted gymnasiums; not fatal accidents, anyhow.

That, too, was the police point of view. They had been very nice, the police, very considerate. Very willing to consider the harm that undesirable publicity would do the establishment. But there had to be an inquest, of course. And inquests were painfully public and open to misconstruction. Henrietta's lawyer had seen the local Press and they had promised to play down the affair, but who knew when a clipping might catch the eye of a sub-editor at a temporary loss for a sensation? And then what?

Lucy had wanted to go away before the inquest, to get away from the perpetual reminders of her guilt in the eyes of the Law, but Henrietta had begged her to stay. She had never been able to say no to Henrietta, and this pathetic aged Henrietta was someone whom she could not refuse. So Lucy stayed; doing odd jobs for Henrietta and generally leaving her free to deal with the crowd of extraneous duties that the accident had saddled her with.

But to the inquest she would not go.

She could not sit there with all her load of knowledge and not at some point be tempted to stand up and tell the truth and have the responsibility off her soul.

Who knew what rat the police might smell out? They had come and viewed the gymnasium, and measured things, and reckoned the weight of the boom, and interviewed all and sundry, and consulted the various experts on the subject, and listened and said nothing. They had taken away the pin that had been so fatally insecure; and that may have been mere routine, but who could tell? Who could tell what suspicions they might be entertaining in their large calm breasts and behind their polite expressionless faces?

But as it turned out, a quite unexpected saviour appeared at the inquest. A saviour in the person of Arthur Middleham, tea importer, of 59 West Larborough Road; that is to say, a resident in one of the villas which lined the highroad between West Larborough and the gates of Leys. Mr Middleham knew nothing about College except that it was there, and that the scantily attired young women who flew about the district on bicycles belonged to it. But he had heard about the accident. And it had struck him as odd that a pin in the gymnasium at Leys had moved out of place on the same morning, and presumably about the same time, as a pane of glass had been shaken out of his drawing-room window by a passing convoy of tanks from the works at South Larborough. His theory was, in fact, the same as Miss Lux's; vibration. Only Miss Lux's had been a hit in the dark and of no value. Mr Middleham's was reasonable and backed

by three-dimensional evidence: a pane of broken glass.

And as always when someone has given a lead, there were gratuitous followers. (If someone invented a story and wrote to the Press that they had seen a green lion in the sky at 5.30 the previous evening, at least six people would have seen it retrospectively.) An excited woman, hearing Mr Middleham's evidence, got up from the body of the hall and said that her ginger jar that she had had for years had dropped off the little table in her window of its own accord at the same time.

"Where do you live, madam?" the coroner asked, when he had winkled her out of the crowd and installed her as evidence.

She lived in the cottages between Leys and Bidlington, she said. On the highroad? Oh, yes, much too much on the highroad; in the summer the dust was a fair sickener, and when the traffic was them there tanks — . No, she had no cat. No, there had been no one in the room. She had just come in after breakfast and found it on the floor. It had never happened before.

Poor O'Donnell, very nervous but clear and decided, gave evidence that she had put up the end by the wall and that Rouse had attended to the middle end. "Putting it up" meant hoisting the boom by the pulley rope and pushing the pin under it to keep it up. It was also kept up, to a certain extent, by the rope, the hanging end of which was given a turn round a cleat on the upright. No, they had not tested the apparatus before going.

Froken, asked about the rope which had not proved a substitute for the pin, said that it had not been wound tightly enough to prevent sagging when the pin was removed. The twisting of the rope round the cleat was an automatic gesture, and no student thought of it as a precautionary measure. It was that, in fact, of course. The metal of the pin might break through some fault, and the rope in that case took the strain. Yes, it was possible that a rope, unaccustomed to a greater strain than the weight of a boom, stretched under the sudden addition of a ten-stone burden, but she thought not. Gymnasium ropes were highly tested and guaranteed. It was much more likely that the twist Miss Rouse gave it had been inadequate.

And that seemed to be all. It was an unfortunate accident. The pin the police had abstracted had been used by all and sundry during the Demonstration, and was no evidence of anything.

It was obviously Death By Misadventure.

Well, that was the end of it, Lucy thought, when she heard the news. She had waited in the drawing-room, looking out at the rainy garden, not able to believe that something would not go wrong. No crime was ever committed without a slip-up somewhere; she had read enough case-histories to know that.

There had been one slip-up already, when that little ornament came loose from a shoe. Who knew what else the police might have unearthed? And now it was over, and Innes was safe. And she knew now that it was for Innes that she had put herself in the Law's reverence. She had thought it was for Innes's mother, for Henrietta, for absolute justice. But in the latter end it was because whatever Innes had done she had not deserved what the Law would do to her. She had been highly tried, and her breaking-point was lower than normal. She lacked some alloy, some good coarse reinforcing stuff, that would have helped her to stand tension without giving way. But she was too fine to throw away.

Lucy noticed with interest the quality of the cheer that greeted her as she went up to receive her diploma on Wednesday morning. The cheers for the various Seniors varied not only in intensity but in quality. There was laughter, for instance, and affection in the reception they gave Dakers. And Beau got a Head Senior's tribute; the congratulations of her inferiors to a highly popular Senior. But there was something in the cheer that they gave Innes that was remarkable; a warmth of admiration, a sympathy, and a well-wishing, that was accorded to no one else. Lucy wondered if it was merely that her inability to take the Arlinghurst appointment had moved them. Henrietta had said, during that conversation about Rouse and her examination tactics, that Innes was not popular. But there was something more in that cheer than mere popularity. They admired her. It was their tribute to quality.

The giving of diplomas, postponed from Tuesday to Wednesday because of the inquest, was the last event of Lucy's stay at Leys. She had arranged to catch the twelve o'clock train to London. She had been touched during the last few days to receive an endless string of small presents, which were left in her room with written messages attached. She hardly ever returned to her room without finding a new one there. Very few people had given Lucy presents since she grew up, and she still had a child's pleasure in being given something, however small. And these gifts had a spontaneity that was heart-warming; it was no concerted effort, no affair of putting the hat round; they had each given her something as it occurred to them. The Disciples' offering was a large white card which said:

THIS WILL ADMIT
Miss Lucy Pym
TO THE FOUR DISCIPLES CLINIC
AT MANCHESTER
and will provide
A COURSE
OF TREATMENTS
Of any kind whatever
At any time whatever.

Dakers had contributed a small untidy parcel, labelled: "To remind you every morning of our first meeting!" which on being opened proved to be one of those flat loofahs for back-scrubbing. It was surely in some other life that she had been peered at over the bathroom partition by that waggish pony's-face. It was certainly not this Lucy Pym who had sat in the bath.

The devoted Miss Morris had made her a little felt purse-Heaven alone knew when the child had found time to fabricate it-and at the other end of the scale of worldly magnificence was Beau's pigskin case, which bore the message: "You will have so many parting gifts that you will need something to put them in," and was stamped with her initials. Even Giddy, with whom she had spent odd half hours talking about rheumatism and rats, had sent up a plant in a pot. She had no idea what it was-it looked fleshy and faintly obscene-but was relieved that it was small. Travelling with a pot plant was not her idea of what was fitting.

Beau had come in between breakfast and Diploma-giving to help her pack, but all the serious packing was done. Whether anything

would close once everything was in was another matter.

"I'll come back and sit on them for you before morning clinic," Beau said. "We are free until then. Except for clinic there is nothing much to do until we go home on Friday."

"You'll be sorry to finish at Leys?"

"Dreadfully. I've had a wonderful time. However, summer holidays are a great consolation."

"Innes told me some time ago that you were going to Norway together."

"Yes, we were," Beau said, "but we're not any more."

"Oh."

"Innes has other plans."

It was evident that this relationship was not what it had been.

"Well, I'd better go and see that the Juniors haven't hogged all the best seats at the Diploma Do," she said, and went.

But there was one relationship that showed satisfactory progress.

The Nut Tart knocked at her door and said that she had come to give dear Miss Pym a luck-piece. She came in, looked at the piled cases, and said with her customary frankness: "You are not a very good packer, are you? Neither am I. It is a pedestrian talent."

Lucy, whose luck-pieces in the last few days had ranged from a Woolworth monkey-on-a-stick to a South African halfpenny, waited with some curiosity to see what The Nut Tart's idea of the thing might be.

It was a blue bead.

"It was dug up in Central America a hundred years ago and it is almost as old as the world. It is very lucky."

"But I can't take that from you," Lucy protested.

"Oh, I have a little bracelet of them. It was the bracelet that was dug up. But I have taken out one of the beads for you. There are five left and that is plenty. And I have a piece of news for you. I am not going back to Brazil."

"No?"

"I am going to stay in England and marry Rick."

Lucy said that she was delighted to hear it.

"We shall be married in London in October, and you will be there and you will come to the wedding, no?"

Yes, Lucy would come to the wedding with pleasure.

"I am so glad about it," she said. She needed some contact with happiness after the last few days.

"Yes, it is all very satisfactory. We are cousins but not too near, and it is sensible to keep it in the family. I always thought I should like to marry an Englishman; and of course Rick is a parti. He is senior partner although he is so young. My parents are very pleased. And my grandmother, of course."

"And I take it that you yourself are pleased?" Lucy said, a shade dashed by this matter-of-fact catalogue.

"Oh yes. Rick is the only person in the world except my grandmother who can make me do things I don't want to do. That will be very good for me."

She looked at Lucy's doubtful face, and her great eyes sparkled.

"And of course I like him very much," she said.

When the diplomas had been presented, Lucy had mid-morning coffee with the Staff and said goodbye to them. Since she was leaving in the middle of the morning no one was free to come to the station with her. Henrietta thanked her, with undoubted tears in her eyes this time, for the help she had been. (But not in her wildest imaginings would Henrietta guess how much the help amounted to.) Lucy was to consider Leys as her home any time she wanted to come and stay, or if she ever wanted a lecturer's job again, or if-or if-

And Lucy had to hide the fact that Leys, where she had been so happy, was the one place in the world that she would never come back to. A place that she was going, if her conscience and the shade of Rouse would let her, to blot out of her mind.

The Staff went to their various duties and Lucy went back to her room to finish packing. She had not spoken to Innes since that so-incredible conversation on Saturday morning; had hardly seen her, indeed, except for the moment when she had taken her diploma from Miss Hodge's hands.

Was Innes going to let her go without a word?

But when she came back to her room she found that word on her table. A written word. She opened the envelope and read

Dear Miss Pym,

Here it is in writing. For the rest of my life I shall atone for the thing I can't undo. I pay forfeit gladly. My life for hers.

I am sorry that this has spoiled Leys for you. And I hope that you will not be unhappy about what you have done for me. I promise to make it worth while.

Perhaps, ten years from today, you will come to the West Country and see what I have done with my life. That would give me a date to look forward to. A landmark in a world without them.

Meanwhile, and always, my gratitude-my unspeakable gratitude.

Mary Innes.

"What time did you order the taxi for?" Beau asked, coming in on top of her knock.

"Half-past eleven."

"It's practically that now. Have you everything in that is going in? Hot water bottle? You hadn't one. Umbrella down-stairs? You don't possess one. What do you do? Wait in doorways till it's over, or steal the nearest one? I had an aunt who always bought the cheapest she could find and discarded it in the nearest waste-paper-bin when the rain stopped. More money than sense, as my nanny used to say. Well, now. Is that all? Consider well, because once we get those cases shut we'll never get them open again. Nothing left in the drawers? People always leave things stuck at the back of drawers." She opened the small drawers of the table and ran her hands into the back of them. "Half the divorces in the Western Hemisphere start through the subsequent revelations."

She withdrew her right hand, and Lucy saw that she was holding the little silver rosette; left lying at the back of the drawer because Lucy had not been able to make up her mind what to do with it.

Beau turned it over in her fingers.

"That looks like the little button thing off my shoe," she said.

"Your shoe?"

"Yes. Those black pump things that one wore at dancing class. I hung on to them because they are so lovely when one's feet are tired. Like gloves. I can still wear the shoes I wore when I was fourteen. I always had enormous feet for my age, and believe me it was no consolation to be told that you were going to be tall." Her attention went back to the thing she was holding. "So this is where I lost it," she said. "You know, I wondered quite a lot about that." She dropped it into her pocket. "You'll have to sit on this case, I'm afraid. You sit on it and I'll wrestle with the locks."

Automatically Lucy sat on it.

She wondered why she had never noticed before how cold those blue eyes were. Brilliant and cold and shallow.

The bright hair fell over her lap as Beau wrestled with the locks. The locks would do what she wanted, of course. Everything and everyone, always, since the day she was born, had done what she wanted. If they hadn't, she took steps to see that they did. At the age of four, Lucy remembered, she had defeated a whole adult world because her will to have things her way was greater than all the wills combined against her.

She had never known frustration.

She could not visualise the possibility of frustration.

If *her* friend had the obvious right to Arlinghurst, then to Arlinghurst she should go.

"There! That's done it. Stand by to sit on the other if I can't manage it. I see Giddy's given you one of his loathsome little plants. What a bore for you. Perhaps you can exchange it for a bowl at the back door one day."

How soon, Lucy wondered, had Innes begun to suspect? Almost at once? Certainly before the afternoon, when she had turned green on the spot where it had happened.

But she had not been sure until she saw the silver rosette on Lucy's palm, and learned where it had been found.

Poor Innes. Poor Innes, who was paying forfeit.

"Tax-i!" yelled a voice along the corridor.

"There's your cab. I'll take your things. No, they're quite light; you forget the training I've had. I wish you weren't going, Miss Pym. We shall miss you so much."

Lucy heard herself saying the obvious things. She even heard herself promising Beau that she might come to them for Christmas, when Beau would be home for her first «working» holidays.

Beau put her into the cab, took a tender farewell of her, and said: "The station" to the driver, and the taxi slid into motion and Beau's face smiled a moment beyond the window, and was gone.

The driver pushed back the glass panel and asked: "London train, lady?" Yes, Lucy said, to London.

And in London she would stay. In London was her own, safe, nice, calm, collected existence, and in future she would be content with it. She would even give up lecturing on psychology.

What did she know about psychology anyhow?

As a psychologist she was a first-rate teacher of French.

She could write a book about character as betrayed by facial characteristics. At least she had been right about that. Mostly.

Eyebrows that sent people to the stake.

Yes, she would write a book about face-reading.

Under another name, of course. Face-reading was not well seen among the intelligentsia.

THE CLASSIC MYSTERY WRITER

JOSEPHNE.

Brat Farrar

TEM

"Aunt Bee," said Jane, breathing heavily into her soup, "was Noah a cleverer back-room boy than Ulysses, or was Ulysses a cleverer back-room boy than Noah?"

"Don't eat out of the point of your spoon, Jane."

"I can't mobilise the strings out of the side."

"Ruth does."

Jane looked across at her twin, negotiating the vermicelli with smug neatness.

"She has a stronger suck than I have."

"Aunt Bee has a face like a very expensive cat," Ruth said, eyeing her aunt sideways.

Bee privately thought that this was a very good description, but wished that Ruth would not be quaint.

"No, but which was the cleverest?" said Jane, who never departed from a path once her feet were on it.

"Clever-er." said Ruth.

"Was it Noah or Ulysses? Simon, which was it, do you think?"

"Ulysses," said her brother, not looking up from his paper.

It was so like Simon, Bee thought, to be reading the list of runners at Newmarket, peppering his soup, and listening to the conversation at one and the same time.

"Why, Simon? Why Ulysses?"

"He hadn't Noah's good Met. service. Whereabouts was Firelight in the Free Handicap, do you remember?"

"Oh, away down," Bee said.

"A coming-of-age is a little like a wedding, isn't it, Simon?" This was Ruth.

"Better on the whole."

"Is it?"

"You can stay and dance at your own coming of age. Which you can't at your wedding."

"I shall stay and dance at my wedding."

"I wouldn't put it past you."

Oh, dear, thought Bee, I suppose there are families that have *conversation* at meals, but I don't know how they manage it. Perhaps I haven't been strict enough.

She looked down the table at the three bent heads, and Eleanor's still vacant place, and wondered if she had done right by them. Would Bill and Nora be pleased with what she had made of their children? If by some miracle they could walk in now, young and fine-looking and gay as they had gone to their deaths, would they say: "Ah, yes, that is just how we pictured them; even to Jane's ragamuffin look."

Bee's eyes smiled as they rested on Jane.

The twins were nine-going-on-ten and identical. Identical, that is to say, in the technical sense. In spite of their physical resemblance there was never any doubt as to which was Jane and which was Ruth. They had the same straight flaxen hair, the same small-boned face and pale skin, the same direct gaze with a challenge in it; but there the identity stopped. Jane was wearing rather grubby jodhpurs and a shapeless jersey festooned with pulled ends of wool. Her hair was pushed back without aid of mirror and held in the uncompromising clasp of a kirby-grip so old that it had reverted to its original steel colour, as old hairpins do. She was slightly astigmatic and, when in the presence of Authority, was in the habit of wearing horn-rimmed spectacles. Normally they lived in the hip pocket of her breeches, and they had been lain-upon, leant-upon, and sat-upon so often that she lived in a permanent state of bankruptcy: breakages over the yearly allowance having to be paid for out of her money-box. She rode to and fro to lessons at the Rectory on Fourposter, the old white pony; her short legs sticking out on either side of him like straws. Fourposter had long ago become a conveyance rather than a ride, so it did not matter that his great barrel was as manageable as a feather-bed and almost as wide.

Ruth, on the other hand, wore a pink cotton frock, as fresh as when she had set off on her bicycle that morning for the Rectory. Her hands were clean and the nails unbroken, and somewhere she had found a pink ribbon and had tied the two side-pieces of her hair in a bow on the top of her head.

Eight years, Bee was thinking. Eight years of contriving, conserving, and planning. And in six weeks' time her stewardship would come to an end. In little more than a month Simon would be twenty-one, and would inherit his mother's fortune and the lean years would be over. The Ashbys had never been rich but while her brother lived there was ample to keep Latchetts-the house and the three farms on the estate-as it should be kept. Only his sudden death had accounted for the near-poverty of those eight years. And only Bee's own resolution accounted for the fact that her sister-in-law's money would, next month, come to her son intact. There had been no borrowing on the strength of that future inheritance. Not even when Mr. Sandal, of Cosset, Thring and Noble, had been prepared to countenance it. Latchetts must pay its way, Bee had said. And Latchetts, after eight years, was still self-supporting and solvent.

Beyond her nephew's fair head she could see, through the window, the white rails of the south paddock, and the flick of old Regina's tail in the sunlight. It was the horses that had saved them. The horses that had been her brother's hobby had proved the salvation of his house. Year after year, in spite of all the ills, accidents, and sheer cussedness that afflict horseflesh, the horses had shown a profit. The swings had always paid a little more than the roundabouts. When the original small stud that had been her brother's delight seemed likely to be a doubtful prop, Bee had added the small hardy children's ponies to occupy the colder pastures half-way up the down. Eleanor had schooled doubtful hacks into "safe rides for a lady," and had sold them at a profit. And now that the manor was

a boarding-school she was teaching others to ride, at a very respectable price per hour.

"Eleanor is very late, isn't she?"

"Is she out with La Parslow?" Simon asked.

"The Parslow girl, yes."

"The unhappy horse has probably dropped dead."

Simon got up to take away the soup plates, and to help out the meat course from the sideboard, and Bee watched him with critical approval. At least she had managed not to spoil Simon; and that, given Simon's selfish charm, was no small achievement. Simon had an air of appealing dependence that was quite fallacious, but it had fooled all and sundry since he was in the nursery. Bee had watched the fooling process with amusement and something that was like a reluctant admiration; if she herself had been gifted with Simon's particular brand of charm, she felt, she would in all likelihood have made it work for her as Simon did. But she had seen to it that it did not work with her.

"It would be nice if a coming-of-age had something like bridesmaids," Ruth observed, turning over her helping with a fastidious fork.

This fell on stony ground.

"The Rector says that Ulysses was probably a frightful nuisance round the house," said the undeviating Jane.

"Oh!" said Bee, interested in this sidelight on the classics. "Why?"

"He said he was 'without doubt a-a gadget-contriver, and that Penelope was probably very glad to be rid of him for a bit. I wish liver wasn't so *smooth*."

Eleanor came in and helped herself from the sideboard in her usual silent fashion.

"Pah!" said Ruth. "What a smell of stables."

"You're late, Nell," Bee said, inquiring.

"She'll never ride," Eleanor said. "She can't even bump the saddle yet."

"Perhaps loony people can't ride," Ruth suggested.

"Ruth," Bee said, with vigour. "The pupils at the Manor are not lunatic. They are not even mentally deficient. They are just 'difficult."

"Ill-adjusted is the technical description," Simon said.

"Well, they behave like lunatics. If you behave like a lunatic how is anyone to tell that you're not one?"

Since no one had an answer to this, silence fell over the Ashby luncheon table. Eleanor ate with the swift purposefulness of a hungry schoolboy, not lifting her eyes from her plate. Simon took out a pencil and reckoned odds on the margin of his paper. Ruth, who had stolen three biscuits from the jar on the Rectory sideboard and eaten them in the lavatory, made a castle of her food with a moat of gravy round it. Jane consumed hers with industrious pleasure. And Bee sat with her eyes on the view beyond the window.

Over that far ridge the land sloped in chequered miles to the sea and the clustered roofs of Westover. But here, in this high valley, shut off from the Channel gales and open to the sun, the trees stood up in the bright air with a midland serenity: with an air, almost, of enchantment. The scene had the bright perfection and stillness of an apparition.

A fine inheritance; a fine rich inheritance. She hoped that Simon would do well by it. There were times when she had-no, not been afraid. Times perhaps when she had wondered. Simon had far too many sides to him; a quicksilver quality that did not go with a yeoman inheritance. Only Latchetts, of all the surrounding estates, still sheltered a local family and Bee hoped that it would go on sheltering Ashbys for centuries to come. Fair, small-boned, long-headed Ashbys like the ones round the table.

"Jane, must you splash fruit juice round like that?"

"I don't like rhubarb in inches, Aunt Bee, I like it in mush."

"Well, mush it more carefully."

When she had been Jane's age she had mushed up her rhubarb too, and at this same table. At this same table had eaten Ashbys who had died of fever in India, of wounds in the Crimea, of starvation in Queensland, of typhoid at the Cape, and of cirrhosis of the liver in the Straits Settlements. But always there had been an Ashby at Latchetts; and they had done well by the land. Here and there came a ne'er-do-well-like her cousin Walter-but Providence had seen to it that the worthless quality had been confined to younger sons, who could practise their waywardness on subjects remote from Latchetts.

No queens had come to Latchetts to dine; no cavaliers to hide. For three hundred years it had stood in its meadows very much as it stood now; a yeoman's dwelling. And for nearly two of those three hundred years Ashbys had lived in it.

"Simon, dear, see to the cona."

Perhaps its simplicity had saved it. It had pretended to nothing; had aspired to nothing. Its goodness had been dug back into the earth; its sap had returned to its roots. Across the valley the long white house of Clare stood in its park, gracious as a vicereine, but there were no Ledinghams there now. The Ledinghams had been prodigal of their talents and their riches; using Clare as a background, as a purse, as a decoration, as a refuge, but not as a home. For centuries they had peacocked over the world: as pro-consuls, explorers, court jesters, rakes, and revolutionaries; and Clare had supported their extravagances. Now only their portraits remained. And the great house in the park was a boarding-school for the unmanageable children of parents with progressive ideas and large bank accounts.

But the Ashbys stayed at Latchetts.

As Bee poured the coffee the twins disappeared on ploys of their own, this being their half-holiday; and Eleanor drank hers hastily and went back to the stables.

"Do you want the car this afternoon?" Simon asked. "I half promised old Gates that I would bring a calf out from Westover in one of our trailers. His own has collapsed."

"No, I don't need it," Bee said, wondering what had prompted Simon to so dull a chore. She hoped it was not the Gates daughter; who was very pretty, very silly, and very commonplace. Gates was the tenant of Wigsell, the smallest of the three farms; and Simon was not normally tolerant of his opportunism.

"If you really want to know," Simon said as he got up, "I want to see June Kaye's new picture. It's at the Empire."

The disarming frankness of this would have delighted anyone but Beatrice Ashby, who knew very well her nephew's habit of throwing up two balls to divert your attention from the third.

"Can I fetch you anything?"

"You might get one of the new bus timetables from the Westover and District offices if you have time. Eleanor says they have a new Clare service that goes round by Guessgate."

"Bee," said a voice in the hall. "Are you there, Bee?"

"Mrs. Peck," Simon said, going out to meet her.

"Come in, Nancy," Bee called. "Come and have coffee with me. The others have finished."

And the Rector's wife came into the room, put her empty basket on the sideboard, and sat down with a pleased sigh. "I could do with some," she said.

When people mentioned Mrs. Peck's name they still added: "Nancy Ledingham that was, you know;" although it was a decade since she had stunned the social world by marrying George Peck and burying herself in a country rectory. Nancy Ledingham had been more than the "debutante of her year;" she had been a national possession. The penny Press had done for her what the penny postcard had done for Lily Langtry: her beauty was common property. If the public did not stand on chairs to see her pass they certainly stopped the traffic; her appearance as bridesmaid at a wedding was enough to give the authorities palpitations for a week beforehand. She had that serene unquestionable loveliness that defeats even a willing detractor. Indeed the only question seemed to be whether the ultimate coronet would have strawberry leaves or not. More than once the popular Press had supplied her with a crown, but this was generally considered mere wishful thinking; her public would settle for strawberry leaves.

And then, quite suddenly-between a *Tatler* and a *Tatler*, so to speak-she had married George Peck. The shattered Press, doing the best they could for a shattered public, had pulled out the *vox humana* stop and quavered about romance, but George had defeated them. He was a tall, thin man with the face of a very intelligent and rather nice ape. Besides, as the society editor of the *Clarion* said: "A clergyman! I ask you! I could get more romance out of a cement-mixer!"

So the public let her go, into her chosen oblivion. Her aunt, who had been responsible for her coming-out, disinherited her. Her father died in a welter of chagrin and debts. And her old home, the great white house in the park, had become a school.

But after thirteen years of rectory life Nancy Peck was still serenely and unquestionably beautiful; and people still said: "Nancy Ledingham that was, you know."

"I've come for the eggs," she said, "but there's no hurry, is there? It's wonderful to sit and do nothing."

Bee's eyes slid sideways at her in a smile.

"You have such a nice face, Bee."

"Thank you. Ruth says it is a face like a very expensive cat."

"Nonsense. At least-not the furry kind. Oh, I know what she means! The long-necked, short-haired kind that show their small chins. Heraldic cats. Yes, Bee, darling, you have a face like a heraldic cat. Especially when you keep your head still and slide your eyes at people." She put her cup down and sighed again with pleasure. "I can't think how the Nonconformists have failed to discover coffee."

"Discover it?"

"Yes. As a snare. It does far more for one than drink. And yet no one preaches about it, or signs pledges about it. Five mouthfuls and the world looks rosy."

"Was it very grey before?"

"A sort of mud colour. I was so happy this week because it was the first week this year that we hadn't needed sitting-room fires and I had no fires to do and no fireplaces to clean. But nothing-I repeat, nothing-will stop George from throwing his used matches into the fireplace. And as he takes fifteen matches to light one pipe —! The room swarms with waste-paper baskets and ash trays, but no, George must use the fireplace. He doesn't even *aim*, blast him. A fine careless flick of the wrist and the match lands anywhere from the fender to the farthest coal. And they have all got to be picked out again."

"And he says: why don't you leave them."

"He does. However, now that I've had some Latchetts coffee I have decided not to take a chopper to him after all."

"Poor Nan. These Christians."

"How are the coming-of-age preparations getting on?"

"The invitations are about to go to the printers; which is a nice definite stage to have arrived at. A dinner for intimates, here; and a dance for everyone in the barn. What is Alec's address, by the way?"

"I can't remember his latest one off-hand. I'll look it up for you. He has a different one almost every time he writes. I think he gets heaved out when he can't pay his rent. Not that I hear from him often, of course. He has never forgiven me for not marrying well, so

that I could keep my only brother in the state to which he had been accustomed."

"Is he playing just now?"

"I don't know. He had a part in that silly comedy at the Savoy but it ran only a few weeks. He is so much a type that his parts are necessarily limited."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"No one could cast Alec as anything but Alec. You don't know how lucky you are, Bee, to have Ashbys to deal with. The incidence of rakes in the Ashby family is singularly low."

"There was Walter."

"A lone wolf crying in the wilderness. What became of Cousin Walter?"

"Oh, he died."

"In an odour of sanctity?"

"No. Carbolic. A workhouse ward, I think."

"Even Walter wasn't bad, you know. He just liked drink and hadn't the head for it. But when a Ledingham is a rake he is plain bad."

They sat together in a comfortable silence, considering their respective families. Bee was several years older than her friend: almost a generation older. But neither could remember a time when the other was not there; and the Ledingham children had gone in and out of Latchetts as if it were their home, as familiar with it as the Ashbys were with Clare.

"I have been thinking so often lately of Bill and Nora," Nancy said. "This would have been such a happy time for them."

"Yes," Bee said, reflectively; her eyes on the window. It was at that view she had been looking when it happened. On a day very like this and at this time of the year. Standing in the sitting-room window, thinking how lovely everything looked and if they would think that nothing they had seen in Europe was half as lovely. Wondering if Nora would look well again; she had been very pulled down after the twins' birth. Hoping she had been a good deputy for them, and yet a little pleased to be resuming her own life in London to-morrow.

The twins had been asleep, and the older children upstairs grooming themselves for the welcome and for the dinner they were to be allowed to stay up for. In half an hour or so the car would swing out from the avenue of lime trees and come to rest at the door and there they would be; in a flurry of laughter and embracing and present-giving and well-being.

The turning on of the wireless had been so absent-minded a gesture that she did not know that she had done it. "The two o'clock plane from Paris to London," said the cool voice, "with nine passengers and a crew of three crashed this afternoon just after crossing the Kent coast. There were no survivors."

No. There had been no survivors.

"They were so wrapped up in the children," Nancy said. "They have been so much in my mind lately, now that Simon is going to be twenty-one."

"And Patrick has been in mine."

"Patrick?" Nancy sounded at a loss. "Oh, yes, of course. Poor Pat."

Bee looked at her curiously. "You had almost forgotten, hadn't you?"

"Well, it is a long time ago, Bee. And-well, I suppose one's mind tidies away the things it can't hear to remember. Bill and Nora-that was frightful, but it *was* something that happened to people. I mean, it was part of the ordinary risks of life. But Pat-that was different." She sat silent for a moment. "I have pushed it so far down in my mind that I can't even remember what he looked like any more. Was he as like Simon as Ruth is like Jane?"

"Oh, no. They weren't identical twins. Not much more alike than some brothers are. Though oddly enough they were much more in each other's pockets than Ruth and Jane are."

"Simon seems to have got over it. Do you think he remembers it often?"

"He must have remembered it very often lately."

"Yes. But it is a long way between thirteen and twenty-one. I expect even a twin grows shadowy at that distance."

This gave Bee pause. How shadowy was he to her: the kind solemn little boy who should have been coming into his inheritance next month? She tried to call up his face in front of her but there was only a blur. He had been small and immature for his age, but otherwise he was just an Ashby. Less an individual than a family resemblance. All she really remembered, now she thought about it, was that he was solemn and kind.

Kindness was not a common trait in small boys.

Simon had a careless generosity when it did not cost him inconvenience; but Patrick had had that inner kindness that not only gives but gives up.

"I still wonder," Bee said unhappily, "whether we should have allowed the body that was found on the Castleton beach to be buried over there. A pauper's burial, it was."

"But, Bee! It had been months in the water, hadn't it? They couldn't even tell what sex it was; could they? And Castleton is miles away. And they get all the corpses from the Atlantic founderings, anyhow. I mean, the nearer ones. It is not sense to worry over-to identify it with — " Her dismayed voice died into silence.

"No, of course it isn't!" Bee said briskly. "I am just being morbid. Have some more coffee."

And as she poured the coffee she decided that when Nancy had gone she would unlock the private drawer of her desk and burn that pitiful note of Patrick's. It was morbid to keep it, even if she had not looked at it for years. She had never had the heart to tear it up because it had seemed part of Patrick. But of course that was absurd. It was no more part of Patrick than was the despair that had filled him when he wrote: "I'm sorry, but I can't bear it any longer. Don't be angry with me. Patrick." She would take it out and burn it. Burning it would not blot it from her mind, of course, but there was nothing she could do about that. The round schoolboy letters were printed there for always. Round, careful letters written with the stylograph that he had been so attached to. It was so like Patrick to apologise for taking his own life.

Nancy, watching her friend's face, proffered what she considered to be consolation. "They say, you know, that when you throw

yourself from a high place you lose consciousness almost at once."

"I don't think he did it that way, Nan."

"No!" Nancy sounded staggered. "But that was where the note was found. I mean, the coat with the note in the pocket. On the cliff-top."

"Yes, but by the path. By the path down the Gap to the shore."

"Then what do you — ?'

"I think he swam out."

"Till he couldn't come back, you mean?"

"Yes. When I was in *loco parentis* that time, when Bill and Nora were on holiday, we went several times to the Gap, the children and I; to swim and have a picnic. And once when we were there Patrick said that the best way to die-I think he called it the lovely way-would be to swim out until you were too tired to go any farther. He said it quite matter-of-factly, of course. In those days it was-a mere academic matter. When I pointed out that drowning would still be drowning, he said: 'But you would be so tired, you see; you wouldn't care any more. The water would just take you. He loved the water."

She was silent for a little and then blurted out the thing that had been her private nightmare for years.

"I've always been afraid that when it was too late to come back he may have regretted."

"Oh. Bee. no!"

Bee's sidelong glance went to Nancy's beautiful, protesting face.

"Morbid. I know. Forget I said it."

"I don't know now how I *could* have forgotten," Nancy said, wondering. "The worst of pushing horrible things down into one's subconscious is that when they pop up again they are as fresh as if they had been in a refrigerator. You haven't allowed time to get at them to-to mould them over a little."

"I think a great many people have almost forgotten that Simon had a twin," Bee said, excusing. "Or that he has not always been the heir. Certainly no one has mentioned Patrick to me since the coming-of-age celebrations have been in the air."

"Why was Patrick so inconsolable about his parents' death?"

"I didn't know he was. None of us did. All the children were wild with grief to begin with, of course. Sick with it. But none more than another. Patrick seemed bewildered rather than inconsolable. 'You mean: Latchetts belongs to me now? I remember him saying, as if it were some strange idea, difficult to understand. Simon was impatient with him, I remember. Simon was always the brilliant one. I think that it was all too much for Patrick; too strange. The adrift feeling of being suddenly without his father and mother, and the weight of Latchetts on his shoulders. It was too much for him and he was so unhappy that he-took a way out."

"Poor Pat. Poor darling. It was wrong of me to forget him."

"Come; let us go and get those eggs. You won't forget to let me have Alec's address, will you? A Ledingham must have an invitation."

"No, I'll look it up when I go back, and telephone it to you. Can your latest moron take a telephone message?"

"Just."

"Well, I'll stick to basic. You won't forget that he is Alec Loding on the stage, will you?" She picked up her basket from the sideboard. "I wonder if he would come. It is a long time since he has been to Clare. A country life is not Alec's idea of amusement. But an Ashby coming-of-age is surely something that would interest him."

But Alec Loding's main interest in the Ashby coming-of-age was to blow the celebrations sky-high. Indeed, he was at this moment actively engaged in pulling strings to that end.

Or, rather, trying to pull strings. The strings weren't pulling very well.

He was sitting in the back room at the Green Man, the remains of lunch spread before him, and beside him sat a young man. A boy, one would have said, but for something controlled and still that did not go with adolescence. Loding poured coffee for himself and sugared it liberally; casting a glance now and then at his companion, who was turning an almost empty beer glass round and round on the table. The movement was so deliberate that it hardly came under the heading of fidgeting.

"Well?" said Loding at last.

"No."

Loding took a mouthful of coffee.

"Squeamish?"

"I'm not an actor."

Something in the unaccented phrase seemed to sting Loding and he flushed a little.

"You're not asked to be emotional, if that is what you mean. There is no filial devotion to be simulated, you know. Only dutiful affection for an aunt you haven't seen for nearly ten years-which one would expect to be more dutiful than affectionate."

"No."

"You young idiot, I'm offering you a fortune."

"Half a fortune. And you're not offering me anything."

"If I'm not offering it to you, what am I doing?"

"Propositioning me," said the young man. He had not raised his eyes from his slowly-turning beer.

"Very well, I'm propositioning you, to use your barbarous idiom. What is wrong with the proposition?"

"It's crazy."

"What is crazy about it, given the initial advantage of your existence?"

"No one could bring it off."

"It is not so long since a famous general whose face was a household word-if you will forgive the metaphor-was impersonated quite successfully by an actor in broad daylight and in full view of the multitude."

"That is quite different."

"I agree. You aren't asked to impersonate anyone. Just to be yourself. A much easier task."

"No," said the young man.

Loding kept his temper with a visible effort. He had a pink, collapsed face that reminded one of the underside of fresh mushrooms. The flesh hung away from his good Ledingham bones with a discouraged slackness, and the incipient pouches under his eyes detracted from their undoubted intelligence. Managers who had once cast him for gay young rakes now offered him nothing but discredited roues.

"My God!" he said suddenly. "Your teeth!"

Even that did not startle the young man's face into any expression. He lifted his eyes for the first time, resting them incuriously on Loding. "What's the matter with my teeth?" he asked.

"It's how they identify people nowadays. A dentist keeps a record of work, you know. I wonder where those kids went. Something would have to be done about that. Are those front teeth your own?"

"The two middle ones are caps. They were kicked out."

"They went to someone here in town, I remember that much. There was a London trip to see the dentist twice a year; once before Christmas and once in the summer. They went to the dentist in the morning and to a show in the afternoon: pantomime in the winter and the Tournament at Olympia in the summer. These are the kind of things you would have to know, by the way."

"Yes?"

The gentle monosyllable maddened Loding.

"Look, Farrar, what are you frightened of? A strawberry mark? I bathed with that kid in the buff many a time and he hadn't as much as a mole on him. He was so ordinary that you could order him by the dozen from any prep. school in England. You are more like his brother at this moment than that kid ever was, twins though they were. I tell you, I thought for a moment that you were young Ashby. Isn't that good enough for you? You come and live with me for a fortnight and by the end of it there won't be anything you don't know about the village of Clare and its inhabitants. Nor anything about Latchetts. I know every last pantry in it. Nor anything about the Ashbys. Can you swim, by the way?"

The young man nodded. He had gone back to his glass of beer.

"Swim well?"

"Yes."

"Don't you ever qualify a statement?"

"Not unless it needs it."

"The kid could swim like an eel. There's the matter of ears, too. Yours look ordinary enough, and his must have been ordinary too or I should remember. Anyone who has worked in a life-class notices ears. But I must see what photographs of him exist. Front ones wouldn't matter, but a real close-up of an ear might be a give-away. I think I must take a trip to Clare and do some prospecting."

"Don't bother on my account."

Loding was silent for a moment. Then he said, reasonably: "Tell me, do you believe my story at all?"

"Your story?"

"Do you believe that I am who I say I am, and that I come from a village called Clare, where there is someone who is practically your double? Do you believe that? Or do you think that this is just a way of getting you to come home with me?"

"No, I didn't think it was that. I believe your story."

"Well, thank heaven for that, at least," Loding said with a quirk of his eyebrow. "I know that my looks are not what they were, but I should be shattered to find that they suggested the predatory. Well, then. That settled, do you believe that you are as like young Ashby as I say?"

For a whole turn of the glass there was no answer. "I doubt it."

"Why?"

"On your own showing it is some time since you saw him."

"But you don't have to *be* young Ashby. Just look like him. And believe me you do! My God, how you do! It's something I wouldn't have believed unless I saw it with my own eyes; something I have imagined only happened in books. And it is worth a fortune to you. You have only to put out your hand and take it."

"Oh, no, I haven't."

"Metaphorically speaking. Do you realise that except for the first year or so your story would be truth? It would be your own story; able to stand up to any amount of checking." His voice twisted into a comedy note. "Or-would it?"

"Oh, yes, it would check."

"Well, then. You have only to stow away on the Ira Jones out of Westover instead of going for a day trip to Dieppe, et voila!"

"How do you know there was a ship called the Ira Jones at Westover about then?"

"'About then'! You do me scant justice, *amigo*. There was a ship of that repellent title at Westover the day the boy disappeared. I know because I spent most of the day painting her. On canvas, not on her plates, you understand. And the old scow went out before I had finished; bound for the Channel Islands. All my ships go out before I have finished painting them."

There was silence for a little.

"It's in your lap, Farrar."

"So is my table napkin."

"A fortune. A charming small estate. Security. A — "

"Security, did you say?"

"After the initial gamble, of course," Loding said smoothly.

The light eyes that looked at him for a moment held a faint amusement.

"Hadn't it occurred to you at all, Mr. Loding, that the gamble was yours?"

"Mine?"

"You're offering me the sweetest chance for a double-cross that I ever heard of. I take your coaching, pass the exam, and forget about you. And you wouldn't be able to do a thing about it. How did you figure to keep tabs on me?"

"I hadn't. No one with your Ashby looks could be a double-crosser. The Ashbys are monsters of rectitude."

The boy pushed away the glass.

"Which must be why I don't take kindly to the idea of being a phoney. Thank you for my lunch, Mr. Loding. If I had known what you had in mind when you asked me to lunch with you, I wouldn't have — "

"All right, all right. Don't apologise. And don't run away; we'll go together. You don't like my proposition: very good: so be it. But you, on the other hand, fascinate me. I can hardly take my eyes off you, or believe that anything so unique exists. And since you are sure that my improper proposal to you has nothing of the personal in it, there is nothing against our walking as far as the Underground together."

Loding paid for their lunch, and as they walked out of the Green Man he said: "I won't ask where you are living in case you think I want to hound you. But I shall give you my address in the hope that you will come to see me. Oh, no; not about the proposition. If it isn't your cup of tea then it isn't your cup of tea; and if you felt like that you certainly wouldn't make a success of it. No, not about the proposition. I have something in my rooms that I think would interest you."

He paused artistically while they negotiated a street crossing.

"When my old home, Clare, was sold-after my father's death- Nancy bundled together all the personal things in my room and sent them to me. A whole trunkful of rubbish, which I have never had the energy to get rid of, and a large proportion of it consists of snapshots and photographs of the companions of my youth. I think you would find it very interesting."

He glanced sideways at the uncommunicative profile of his companion.

"Tell me," he said as they stopped at the entrance to the Underground, "do you play cards?"

"Not with strangers," said the young man pleasantly.

"I just wondered. I had never met the perfect poker face until now, and I should be sorry if it was being wasted on some nonconformist abstainer. Ah, well. Here is my address. If by any chance I have fled from there the *Spotlight* will find me. I am truly sorry I couldn't sell you the idea of being an Ashby. You would have made an excellent master of Latchetts, I feel. Someone who was at home with horses, and used to an outdoor life."

The young man, who had made a gesture of farewell and was in the act of turning away, paused. "Horses?" he said.

"Yes," Loding said, vaguely surprised. "It's a stud, you know. Very well thought of, I understand."

"Oh." He paused a moment longer, and then turned away.

Loding watched him as he went down the street. "I missed something," he was thinking. "There was some bait he would have risen to, and I missed it. Why should he have nibbled at the word horse? He must be sick of them."

Ah, well; perhaps he would come to see what his double looked like.

The boy lay on his bed in the dark, fully dressed, and stared at the ceiling.

There were no street lamps outside to illuminate this back room under the slates; but the faint haze of light that hangs over London at night, emanation from a million arcs and gas-lights and paraffin lamps, shone ghost-like on the ceiling so that its cracks and stains showed like a world map.

The boy was looking at a map of the world too, but it was not on the ceiling. He was examining his odyssey; conducting a private inventory. That meeting to-day had shaken him. Somewhere, it seemed, there was another fellow so like him that for a moment they could be mistaken for each other. To one who had been very much alone all his life that was an amazing thought.

Indeed, it was the most surprising thing that had happened to him in all his twenty-one years. In a way it was as if all those years that had seemed so full and exciting at the time had been merely leading up to that moment when the actor chap had caught himself short in the street and said: "Hello, Simon."

"Oh! Sorry!" he had said at once. "Thought you were a friend of — " And then he had stopped and stared.

"Can I do something for you?" the boy had asked at last, since the man showed no sign of moving on.

"Yes. You could come and have lunch with me."

''Why?'

"It's lunch-time, and that's my favourite pub behind you."

"But why me?"

"Because you interest me. You are so like a friend of mine. My name is Loding, by the way. Alec Loding. I act a bad part in a bad farce at that very bad old theatre over there." He had nodded across the street. "But Equity, God bless them, has ordained a minimum fee for my labours, so the hire is considerably better than the part, I rejoice to say. Do you mind telling me your name?"

"Farrar."

"Farrell?"

"No. Farrar."

"Oh." The amused, considering look was still in his eye. "Is it long since you came back to England?"

"How did you know I had been out of it?"

"Your clothes, my boy. Clothes are my business. I have dressed too many parts not to recognise American tailoring when I see it. Even the admirably conservative tailoring that you so rightly wear."

"Then what makes you think I'm not American?"

At that the man had smiled quite broadly. "Ah, *that*," he said, "is the eternal mystery of the English. You watch a procession of monks in Italy and your eye singles out one and you say: 'Ha! An Englishman. You come across five hoboes wrapped in gunny sacks sheltering from the rain in Wisconsin, and you notice the fifth and think: 'Dear goodness, that chap's English. You see ten men stripped to the buff for the Foreign Legion doctor to pass judgement on, and you say — But come to lunch and we can explore the subject at leisure."

So he had gone to lunch, and the man had talked and been charming. But always behind the lively puffy eyes there had been that quizzical, amused, almost unbelieving look. That look was more eloquent than any of his subsequent argument. Truly he, Brat Farrar, *must* be like that other fellow to bring that look of half-incredulous amusement into someone's eyes.

He lay on the bed and thought about it. This sudden identification in an unbelonging life. He had a great desire to see this twin of his; this Ashby boy. Ashby. It was a nice name: a good English name. He would like to see the place too: this Latchetts, where his twin had grown up in belonging quiet while he had bucketed round the world, all the way from the orphanage to that moment in a London street, belonging nowhere.

The orphanage. It was no fault of the orphanage that he had not belonged. It was a very good orphanage; a great deal happier than many a home he had seen in passing since. The children had loved it. They had wept when they left and had come back for visits; they had sent contributions to the funds; they had invited the staff to their marriages, and brought their subsequent children for the matron's approval. There was never a day when some old girl or boy was not cluttering up the front door. Then why had he not felt like that?

Because he was a foundling? Was that why? Because no visitors ever came for him; no parcels or letters or invitations? But they had been very wise about that; very determined to prop his self-esteem. If anything he had been privileged beyond the other children by his foundling status. His Christmas present from Matron, he remembered, had been looked upon with envy by children whose only present came from an aunt or uncle; a mere relation, as it were. It was Matron who had taken him off the doorstep; and who saw to it that he heard how well-dressed and cared-for he had been. (He heard about this at judicious intervals for fifteen years but he had never been able to feel any satisfaction about it.) It was Matron who had determined his name with the aid of a pin and the telephone directory. The pin had come down on the word Farrell. Which had pleased Matron considerably; her pin had once, long ago, come down on the word Coffin, and she had had to cheat and try again.

There had never been any doubt about his first name, since he had arrived on the doorstep on St. Bartholomew's day. He had been Bart from the beginning. But the older children had changed that to Brat, and presently even the staff used the more familiar name (another device of Matron's to prevent his feeling "different"?) and the name had followed him to the grammar school.

The grammar school. Why had he not «belonged» there, then?

Because his clothes were subtly different? Surely not. He had not been thin-skinned as a child; merely detached. Because he was a scholarship boy? Certainly not: half his form were scholarship boys. Then why had he decided that the school was not for him? Decided with such un-boylike finality that all Matron's arguments had died into ultimate silence, and she had countenanced his going

to work.

There was no mystery about his not liking the work, of course. The office job had been fifty miles away, and since no ordinary lodgings could be paid for out of his salary he had had to stay in the local "boys' home." He had not known how good the orphanage was until he had sampled the boys' home. He could have supported either the job or the home, but not the two simultaneously. And of the two the office was by far the worse. It was, as a job, comfortable, leisurely, and graced with certain, if far-off, prospects; but to him it had been a prison. He was continually aware of time running past him; time that he was wasting. This was not what he wanted.

He had said good-bye to his office life almost accidentally; certainly without premeditation. "DAY RETURN TO DIEPPE" a bill had said, plastered against the glass of a newsagent's window; and the price, in large red figures, was exactly the amount of his savings to the nearest half-crown. Even so, he would have done nothing about it if it had not been for old Mr. Hendren's funeral. Mr. Hendren was the «retired» partner, and on the day of his funeral the office shut down "out of respect." And so, with a week's pay in his pocket and a whole week-day free, he had taken his savings and gone to see "abroad." He had had a grand time in Dieppe, where his first-year French was no deterrent to enjoyment, but it had not even crossed his mind to stay there until he was on his way home. He had reached the harbour before the shocking idea took hold of him.

Was it native honesty, he thought, staring at the Pimlico ceiling, or his good orphanage training that had made his unpaid laundry bill bulk so large in the subsequent mental struggle? A boy who had no money and no bed for the night should hardly have been concerned with the ethics of bilking a laundry of two-and-threepence.

The camion, rolling up from the harbour, had been his salvation. He had held up his thumb, and the brown, sweaty brigand at the wheel had grinned at this international gesture and slowed as he passed. He had run at the moving cliff-face, snatched and clung, and been hauled aboard. And all his old life was behind him.

He had planned to stay and work in France. Debated with himself during the long run to Havre, when gesture had given out and the driver's patois proved unintelligible, how best he might earn enough to eat. It was his neighbour in the Havre *bistro* who enlightened him. "My young friend," the man had said, fixing him with melancholy spaniel's eyes, "it is not sufficient to be a man in France in order to work. One has also to have papers."

"And where," he had asked, "does one not have papers? I mean, in what country? I can go anywhere." He was suddenly conscious of the world, and that he was free of it.

"God knows," the man had said. "Mankind grows every day more like sheep. Go to the harbour and take a ship."

"Which ship?"

"It is immaterial. Have you in English a game that — " He made descriptive gestures.

"A counting-out game? Oh, yes. Eenie, meenie, minie, moe."

"Good. Go to the harbour and do 'Eenie, meenie, minie, moe'. And when you go aboard 'moe' see that no one is looking. On ships they have a passion for papers that amounts to a madness."

"Moe" was the *Barfleur*, and he had not needed papers after all. He was the gift from heaven that the *Barfleur*'s cook had been looking for for years.

Good old *Barfleur*; with her filthy pea-green galley smelling of over-used olive oil, and the grey seas combing up mountains high, and the continuous miracle of their harmless passing, and the cook's weekly drunk that left him acting unpaid cook, and learning to play a mouth-organ, and the odd literature in the fo'c'sle. Good old *Barfleur*!

He had taken a lot away with him when he left her, but most important of all he took a new name. When he had written his name for the Captain, old Bourdet had taken the final double-L to be an R, and copied the name Farrar. And he had kept it so. Farrell came out of a telephone directory; and Farrar out of a tramp skipper's mistake. It was all one.

And then what?

Tampico and the smell of tallow. And the tally-man who had said: "You Englishman? You want shore job?"

He had gone to inspect the "job," expecting dish-washing.

Odd to think that he might still be living in that great quiet house with the tiled patio, and the bright scentless flowers, and the bare shadowed rooms with the beautiful furniture. Living in luxury, instead of lying on a broken-down bedstead in Pimlico. The old man had liked him, had wanted to adopt him; but he had not "belonged." He had enjoyed reading the English newspaper to him twice a day, the old man following with a slender yellow forefinger on his own copy; but it was not the life he was looking for. ("If he doesn't understand English, what's the good of reading English to him?" he had asked when the job was first explained to him; and they had made him understand that the old man knew «reading» English; having taught himself from a dictionary, but did not know how to pronounce it. He wanted to listen to it spoken by an Englishman.)

No, it had not been for him. It had been like living in a film set.

So he had gone as cook to a collection of botanists. And as he was packing to go the butler had said consolingly: "Better you go, after all. If you stay his mistress poison you."

It was the first he had heard of a mistress.

He had cooked his way steadily to the New Mexico border. That was the easy way into the States: where there was no river to stop you. He enjoyed this absurd, brilliant, angular country but, like the old aristocrat's home near Tampico, it was not what he was looking for.

After that it had been a slow crescendo of satisfaction.

Assistant cook for that outfit at Las Cruces. Their intolerance of any variation from the food they knew, and their delight in his accent. ("Say it again, Limey." And then their laughter and their delighted "Whaddya know!")

Cook to the Snake River round-up. And his discovery of horses. And the feeling it gave him of having come home.

Riding herd for the Santa Clara. And the discovery that «ornery» horses were less ornery when ridden by the limey kid.

A spell with the shoesmith at the Wilson ranch. He had had his first girl there, but it hadn't been half as exciting as seeing what he could do with the "hopeless lot" in the corral. "Nothing but shooting for them," the boss had said. And when he had suggested trying to do something about them, the boss had said unenthusiastically: "Go ahead; but don't expect me to pay hospital bills. You're hired as

help to the farrier."

It was from that lot that Smoky came: his beautiful Smoky. The boss gave it him as a reward for what he had done with the hard cases. And when he went to the Lazy Y he took Smoky with him.

Breaking horses for the Lazy Y. That had been happiness. That had been happiness full up and running over. Nearly two years of it. And then. That momentary slowness on his part; drowsy with heat or dazzled by the sun. And seeing the writhing brown back turning over on him. And hearing his thighbone crack.

The hospital at Edgemont. It had not been at all like the hospitals in films. There were no pretty nurses and no handsome internes. The ward had sage-green walls, the fittings were old and dingy, and the nurses overworked. They alternately spoiled and ignored him.

The sudden stoppage of letters from the boys.

The sweat-making business of learning to walk again, and the slow realisation that his leg had mended "short." That he was going to be permanently lame.

The letter from the boss that put an end to the Lazy Y.

Oil. They had struck oil. The first derrick was already going up not two hundred yards from the bunk house. The enclosed cheque would look after Brat till he was well again. Meanwhile, what should be done with Smoky?

What would a lame man do with a horse in an oil field?

He had cried about Smoky; lying in the dark of the ward. It was the first time he had cried about anyone.

Well, he might be too slow to break horses any more, but he would be no servant to oil. There were other ways of living with horseflesh.

The dude ranch. That had not been like the films either.

Ungainly women in unseemly clothes punishing the saddles of broken-spirited horses until he wondered that they didn't break in two.

The woman who had wanted to marry him.

She had been not at all the kind of woman you'd imagine would want a "kept man." Not fat or silly or amorous. She was thin, and tired-looking, and rather nice; and she had owned the place up the hill from the dude ranch. She would get his leg put right for him, she said. That was the bait she had offered.

The one good thing about the dude ranch was that you made money at it. He had never had so much money in his life as when he finished there. He planned to go East and spend it. And then something had happened to him. The smaller, greener country in the East, the smell of spring gardens, woke in him a nostalgia for England that dismayed him. He had no intention of going back to England for years yet.

For several restless weeks he fought the longing-it was a baby thing to want to go back-and then quite suddenly gave in. After all, he had never seen London. Going to see London was quite a legitimate reason for going to England.

And so to the back room in Pimlico and that meeting in the street.

He got up and took his cigarettes from the pocket of the coat that was hanging on the back of the door.

Why hadn't he been more shocked when Loding made his suggestion?

Because he had guessed that a proposition would be coming? Because the man's face had been warning enough that his interests would be shady? Because it quite simply had nothing to do with him, was not anything that he was likely to touch?

He had not been indignant with the man; had not said: "You swine, to think of cheating your friend out of his inheritance!" or words to that effect. But then he had never been interested in other people's concerns: their sins, their griefs, or their happiness. And anyhow, you couldn't be righteous with a man whose food you were eating.

He moved over to the window and stood looking out at the dim frieze of chimney-pots against the luminous haze. He was not broke yet but he had got the length of prospecting for a job, and the prospects were anything but encouraging. It seemed that there were far more people interested in stable jobs in England than stables to accommodate them. The horse world contracted as the horse lovers expanded. All those men who had lost their main interest in living when the cavalry was put down were still hale and active, and besieged stable entrances at the mere whiff of a vacancy.

Besides, he didn't want just to "do his two a day." If road engineering interested you you didn't pine to spend your days putting tar on the surface.

He had tried a few contacts, but none of the good places was interested in a lame stranger without references. Why should they be? They had their pick of England's best. And when he had mentioned that his experience of breaking had been in the States, that seemed to settle it. "Oh, cattle horses!" they said. They said it quite kindly and politely-he had forgotten until he came back how polite his countrymen were-but they had inferred in one way or another that Western kill-or-cure methods were not theirs. Since they never said so openly he could not explain that they were not his either. And anyhow, it wouldn't have been any good. They wanted to know something about you before they took you to work with them in this country. In America, where a man moved on every so often, it was different; but here a job was for life, and what you were mattered almost as much as what you could do.

The solution, of course, was to leave the country. But the real, the insurmountable trouble was that he didn't want to go. Now that he was back he realised that what he had thought of as free, purposeless wandering had merely been a long way round on the way back to England. He had come back, not via Dieppe, but via Las Cruces and points east; that was all. He had found what he wanted when he found horses; but he had no more sense of "belonging" in New Mexico than he had had at the grammar school. He had liked New Mexico better, that was all.

And better still, now that he looked at it, he liked England. He wanted to work with English horses in an English greenness on English turf.

In any case, it was much more difficult to get out of this country than to get into it, if you were broke. He had shared a table at the Coventry Street Lyons one day with a man who had been trying for eighteen months to work his passage somewhere or other. "Cards!" the little man had snarled. "That's all they ever say. Where is your card? If you don't happen to belong to the Amalgamated Union of Table-napkin Folders you can't as much as help a steward set a table. I'm just waiting to see them let a ship sink under them because no one aboard has the right card for manning a pump with."

He had looked at the Englishman's furious blue eyes and remembered the man in the Havre *bistro*. "One has also to have papers." Yes, the world was cluttered up with paper.

It was a pity that Loding's proposition was so very criminal.

Would he have listened to it with any more interest if Loding had mentioned the horses earlier?

No, of course not; that was absurd. The thing was criminal and he wouldn't touch it.

"It would be quite safe, you know," said a voice in him. "They wouldn't prosecute you even if they found out, because of the scandal. Loding said that."

"Shut up," he said. "The thing's criminal."

It might be amusing to go and see Loding act, one night. He had never met an actor before. It would be a new sensation to sit and watch the performance of someone you knew "off." How would Loding be as a partner?

"A very clever partner, believe me," said the voice.

"A plain bad lot," he said. "I don't want any part of him."

"You don't need any part of any of it," said the voice. "You have only to go to Latchetts and say: Take a look at me. Do I remind you of anyone? I was left on a doorstep on such-and-such a date, and as from to-day I want a job."

"Blackmail, 'm? And how much do you think I'd enjoy a job I'd blackmailed out of anyone? Don't be silly."

"They owe you something, don't they?"

"No, they don't. Not a bean."

"Oh, come off it! You're an Ashby and you know it."

"I don't know it. There have been doubles before. Hitler had several. *Lots* of famous people have doubles. The papers are for ever printing photographs of the humble doubles of great men. They all look like the great men with the character sponged out."

"Bunk. You're an Ashby. Where did you get your way with horses?"

"Lots of people have a way with horses."

"There were sixty-two kids at that orphanage, and did any of them go about spurning good jobs, and adoption by rich parents, so that they could find their way to horses?"

"I didn't know I was looking for horses."

"Of course you didn't know. Your Ashby blood knew."

"Oh, shut up."

To-morrow he would go down to Lewes and have a go at that jumping stable. He might be lame but he could still ride anything on four legs. They might be interested in someone who could ride at ten stone and didn't mind risking his neck.

"Risk your neck when you might be living in clover?"

"If it was clover I wanted I could have had it long ago."

"Ah, but not clover with horses in it."

"Shut up. You're wasting your time."

He began to undress, as if movement might put an end to the voice. Yes: he would go down to Lewes. It was a little too near his calf country, but no one would recognise him after those six years. It wouldn't really matter, of course, if they did; but he didn't want to go backwards.

"You could always say: Sorry, my name is Ashby," mocked the voice.

"Will you be quiet!"

As he hung his jacket over the back of the chair he thought about that young Ashby who had bowed out. With everything in the world to live for he had gone and thrown himself off a cliff. It didn't make sense. Did parents matter all that much?

"No, he was a poor thing, and you'd make a much better job of Latchetts in his place."

He poured cold water into the basin and washed vigorously; an orphanage training being almost as lasting as a Regular Service one. And as he towelled himself on the thin turkish-so old that it was limp-wet before he was dry-he thought: "I wouldn't like it, anyhow. Butlers, and things." His idea of English middle-class life being derived from American films.

Anyhow, the thing was unthinkable.

And he'd better stop thinking about it.

Someone had said that if you thought about the unthinkable long enough it became quite reasonable.

But he would go some time and see those photographs of Loding's. There was no harm in that.

He must see what his «twin» looked like.

He didn't like Loding much, but just going to see him could do no harm, and he did want to see photographs of Latchetts.

Yes, he would go to see Loding.

The day after to-morrow perhaps; after he had been to Lewes.

Or even to-morrow.

Mr. Sandal, of Cosset, Thring and Noble, was nearing the end of his afternoon's work and his mind was beginning its daily debate as to whether it should be the 4.55 or the 5.15 that should bear him home. This was almost the only debate that ever exercised Mr. Sandal's mind. The clients of Cosset, Thring and Noble were of two kinds only: those who made up their own minds about a problem and told their solicitors in firm tones what they wanted done, and those who had no problems. The even pulse of the Georgian office in the shadow of the plane trees was never quickened by unexpected news or untoward happenings. Even the death of a client was not news: clients were expected to die; the appropriate will would be in the appropriate deed-box and things would go on as before.

Family solicitors; that is what Cosset, Thring and Noble were. Keepers of wills and protectors of secrets; but not wrestlers with problems. Which is why Mr. Sandal was by no means the best person to take what was coming to him.

"Is that all, Mercer?" he said to his clerk, who had been showing a visitor out.

"There's one client in the waiting-room, sir. Young Mr. Ashby."

"Ashby? Of Latchetts?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, good; good. Bring in a pot of tea, Mercer, will you?"

"Yes, sir." And to the client: "Will you come in, sir?"

The young man came in.

"Ah, Simon, my dear boy," Mr. Sandal said, shaking hands with him, "I am delighted to see you. Are you up on business, or are you just — "

His voice died away uncertainly, and he stared, the gesture of his arm towards a chair arrested mid-way.

"God bless my soul," he said, "you are not Simon."

"No. I am not Simon."

"But-but you are an Ashby."

"If you think that, it makes things a whole lot easier for me."

"Yes? Do forgive me if I am a little confused. I didn't know that there were Ashby cousins."

"There aren't, as far as I know."

"No? Then-forgive me-which Ashby are you?"

"Patrick."

Mr. Sandal's neat mouth opened and shut like a goldfish's.

He stopped being a green thought in a green shade and became a very worried and staggered little lawyer.

For a long moment he looked into the light Ashby eyes so near his own without finding any words that seemed adequate to the occasion.

"I think we had better both sit down," he said at last. He indicated the visitors' chair, and subsided into his own with an air of being glad of an anchorage in a world suddenly at sea.

"Now, let us clarify the situation," he said. "The only Patrick Ashby died at the age of thirteen, some-let me see-eight years ago, it must be."

"What makes you think he died?"

"He committed suicide, and left a farewell note."

"Did the note mention suicide?"

"I am afraid I cannot recall the wording."

"Nor can I, exactly. But I can give you the sense of it. It said: 'I can't stand it any longer. Don't be angry with me."

"Yes. Yes, that was the tenor of the message."

"And where in that is the mention of suicide?"

"The suggestion surely is-One would naturally infer-The letter was found on the cliff-top with the boy's coat."

"The cliff path is the short cut to the harbour."

"The harbour? You mean — "

"It was a running-away note; not a suicide one."

"But-but the coat?"

"You can't leave a note on the open down. The only way to leave it is in the pocket of something."

"Are you seriously suggesting that-that-that you are Patrick Ashby, and that you never committed suicide at all?"

The young man looked at him with those unrevealing eyes of his. "When I came in," he said, "you took me for my brother."

"Yes. They were twins. Not identical twins, but of course very — " The full implication of what he was saying came home to him. "God bless my soul, so I did. So I did."

He sat for a moment or two staring in a helpless fashion. And while he stared Mercer came in with the tea.

"Do you take tea?" Mr. Sandal asked, the question being merely a reflex conditioned by the presence of the tea-tray.

"Thank you," said the young man. "No sugar."

"You do realise, don't you," Mr. Sandal said, half-appealingly, "that such a very startling and-and serious claim must be investigated? One cannot, you understand, merely accept your statement."

"I don't expect you to."

"Good. That is good. Very sensible of you. At some later date it may be possible-the fatted calf-but just now we have to be sensible

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about it. You do see that. Milk?"
   "Thank you."
   "For instance: you ran away, you say. Ran away to sea, I take it."
   "Yes."
   "On what ship?"
   "The Ira Jones. She was lying in Westover harbour."
   "You stowed away, of course."
   "Yes."
   "And where did the ship take you?" asked Mr. Sandal, making notes and beginning to feel that he wasn't doing so badly after all.
This was quite the worst situation he had ever been in, and there was no question of catching the 5.15 now.
   "The Channel Islands. St. Helier."
   "Were you discovered on board?"
   "No."
   "You disembarked at St. Helier, undiscovered."
   "Yes."
   "And there?"
   "I got the boat to St. Malo."
   "You stowed away again?"
   "No, I paid my fare."
   "You remember what the boat was called?"
   "No; it was the regular ferry service."
   "I see. And then?"
   "I went bus-riding. Buses always seemed to me more exciting than that old station wagon at Latchetts, but I never had a chance of
riding in them."
   "The station wagon. Ah, yes," said Mr. Sandal; and wrote: "Remembers car." "And then?"
   "Let me see. I was garage-boy for a while at an hotel in a place called Villedieu."
   "You remember the name of the hotel, perhaps?"
   "The Dauphin, I think. From there I went across country and fetched up in Havre. In Havre I got a job as galley boy on a tramp
steamer."
   "The name? You remember it?"
   "I'll never forget it! She was called the Barfleur. I joined her as Farrar. F-a-r-r-a-r. I stayed with her until I left her in Tampico. From
there I worked my way north to the States. Would you like me to write down for you the places I worked at in the States?"
   "That would be very kind of you. Here is-ah, you have a pen. If you would just write them here, in a list. Thank you. And you came
back to England — ?"
   "On the 2nd of last month. On the Philadelphia. As a passenger. I took a room in London and have lived there ever since. I'll write
the address for you; you'll want to check that too."
   "Yes. Thank you. Yes." Mr. Sandal had an odd feeling that it was this young man-who after all was on trial, so to speak-who was
dominating the situation and not, as it certainly should be, himself. He pulled himself together.
   "Have you attempted to communicate with your — I mean, with Miss Ashby?"
   "No, is it difficult?" said the young man gently. "What I mean is — "
   "I've done nothing about my family, if that is what you mean. I thought this was the best way."
   "Very wise. Very wise." There he was again, being forced into the position of chorus. "I shall get in touch with Miss Ashby at once,
and inform her of your visit."
   "Tell her that I'm alive, ves."
   "Yes. Quite so." Was the young man making fun of him? Surely not.
   "Meanwhile you will go on living at this address?"
   "Yes, I shall be there." The young man got up, again taking the initiative from him.
   "If your credentials prove to be good," Mr. Sandal said with an attempt at severity, "I shall be the first to welcome you back to
England and to your home. In spite of the fact that your desertion of it has caused deep grief to all concerned. I find it inexplicable that
you should not have communicated with your people before now."
   "Perhaps I liked being dead."
   "Being dead!"
   "Anyhow you never did find me very explicable, did you?"
   "Didn't I?"
   "You thought it was because I was afraid that I cried, that day at Olympia, didn't you?"
   "Olympia?"
   "It wasn't you know. It was because the horses were so beautiful."
   "Olympia! You mean.... But that was.... You remember, then — "
   "I expect you'll let me know, Mr. Sandal, when you have checked my statements."
   "What? Oh, yes; yes, certainly." Good heavens, even he himself had forgotten that children's party at the Tournament. Perhaps he
had been altogether too cautious. If this young man-the owner of Latchetts-dear me! Perhaps he should not have been so —
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"I hope you don't think — " he began.

But the young man was gone, letting himself out with cool decision and a brief nod to Mercer.

Mr. Sandal sat down in the inner office and mopped his brow.

And Brat, walking down the street, was shocked to find himself exhilarated. He had expected to be nervous and a little ashamed. And it had not been in the least like that. It had been one of the most exciting things he had ever done. A wonderful, tight-rope sort of thing. He had sat there and lied and not even been conscious that he was lying, it had been so thrilling. It was like riding a rogue; you had the same wary, strung-up feeling; the same satisfaction in avoiding an unexpected movement to destroy you. But nothing he had ever ridden had given him the mental excitement, the subsequent glow of achievement, that this had given him. He was drunk with it.

And greatly surprised.

So this, he thought, was what sent criminals back to their old Ways when there was no material need. This breathless, step-picking excitement; this subsequent intoxication of achievement.

He went to have tea, according to Loding's instructions; but he could not eat. He felt as if he had already had food and drink. No previous experience of his had had this oddly satisfying effect. Normally, after the exciting things of life-riding, love-making, rescue, close calls-he was ravenously hungry. But now he just sat and looked at the food in front of him in a daze of content. The glow inside him left no room for food.

No one had followed him into the restaurant, and no one seemed to be taking any interest in him.

He paid his bill and went out. No one was loitering anywhere; the pavement was one long stream of hurrying people. He went to a telephone at Victoria.

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"Well?" said Loding. "How did it go?"
"Wonderful."
"Have you been drinking?"
"No. Why?"
"That is the first time I have ever heard you use a superlative."
"I'm just pleased."
"My God, you must be. Does it show?"
"Show?"
"Is there any faint change in that poker face of yours?"
"How should I know? Don't you want to know about this afternoon?"
"I already know the most important thing."
"What is that?"
"You haven't been given in charge."
"Did you expect me to be?"
"There was always the chance. But I didn't really expect it. Not with our combined intelligences."
"Thanks."
"Did the old boy fall on your neck?"
"No. He nearly fell over. He's being very correct."
"Everything to be verified."
"Yes."
"How did he receive you?"
"He took me for Simon."
He heard Loding's amused laughter.
"Did you manage to use his Tournament party?"
"Oh, my God, don't go monosyllabic on me. You didn't have to rake it up, did you?"
"No. It fitted very neatly."
"Was he impressed?"
"It had him on the ropes."
"It didn't convince him, though?"
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"You mean, that was your exit line? My boy, I take off my hat to you. You're a perishing marvel. After living in your pocket for the last fortnight I thought I was beginning to know you. But you're still surprising me to death."

"I surprise myself, if it's any consolation to you."

"I don't detect any bitterness in that line, do I?"

"I didn't wait to see. I was on my way out."

"No. Just surprise. Neat."

"Ah, well; we shall not be meeting for some time to come. It has been a privilege to know you, my boy. I shall never hear Kew Gardens mentioned without thinking tenderly of you. And I look forward, of course, to further privileges from knowing you in the future. Meanwhile, don't ring me up unless there is absolutely no alternative. You are as well briefed as I can make you. From now on you're on your own."

Loding was right: it had been a wonderful briefing. For a whole fortnight, from early morning till seven in the evening, rain or shine, they had sat in Kew Gardens and rehearsed the ways of Latchetts and Clare, the histories of Ashbys and Ledinghams, the lie of a land he had never seen. And that too had been exciting. He had always been what they called "good at exams"; and had always come to an examination paper with the same faint pleasure that an addict brings to a quiz party. And those fourteen days in Kew Gardens had been one glorified quiz party. Indeed, the last few days had had some of the tight-rope excitement that had characterised this afternoon. "Which arm did you bowl with?" "Go to the stables from the side door." "Did you sing?" "Could you play the piano?" "Who lived in the lodge at Clare?" "What colour was your mother's hair?" "How did your father make his money, apart from the estate?" "What was the name of his firm?" "What was your favourite food?" "The name of the tuck-shop owner in the village?" "Where is the Ashby pew

in the church?" "Go from the great drawing-room to the butler's pantry in Clare." "What was the housekeeper's name?" "Could you ride a bicycle?" "What do you see from the south window in the attic?" Loding fired the questions at him through the long days, and it had been first amusing and then exciting to avoid being stumped.

Kew had been Loding's idea. "Your life since you came to London must be subject to the most searching scrutiny, if you will forgive the cliche. So you can't come and live with me as I suggested. You can't even be seen with me by anyone we know. Nor can I come to your Pimlico place. You must go on being unvisited there as you have been up till now." So the Kew scheme had been evolved. Kew Gardens, Loding said, had perfect cover and a wonderful field of fire. There was nowhere in London where you could see approaching figures at such a distance and still be unnoticed yourself. Nowhere in London that offered the variety of meeting-places, the undisturbed quiet, that Kew did.

So each morning they had arrived separately, by different gates; had met at a new point and gone to a different region; and there for a fortnight Loding had primed him with photographs, maps, plans, drawings, and pencilled diagrams. He had begun with a one-inch Ordnance Survey map of Clare and its surroundings, progressed to a larger size, and thence to plans of the house; so that it was rather like coming down from above in a plane. First the lie of the country, then the details of fields and gardens, and then the close-up of the house so that the thing was whole in his mind from the beginning, and the details had merely to be pointed on a picture already etched. It was methodical, careful teaching, and Brat appreciated it.

But the highlight, of course, was provided by the photographs. And it was not, oddly enough, the photograph of his «twin» that held his attention once he had seen them all. Simon, of course, was extraordinarily like him; and it gave him a strange, almost embarrassed, feeling to look at the pictured face so like his own. But it was not Simon who held his interest; it was the child who had not lived to grow up; the boy whose place he was going to take. He had an odd feeling of identity with Patrick.

Even he himself noticed this, and found it strange. He should have been filled with guilt when he considered Patrick. But his only emotion was one of partisanship; almost of alliance.

Crossing the courtyard at Victoria after telephoning, he wondered what had prompted him to say that about Patrick crying. Loding had told him merely that Patrick had cried for no known reason (he was seven then) and that old Sandal had been disgusted and had never taken the children out again. Loding had left the story with him to be used as and when he thought fit. What had prompted him to say that Patrick had cried because the horses were so beautiful? Was that, perhaps, why Patrick *had* cried?

Well, there was no going back now, whether he wanted to or not. That insistent voice that had talked to him in the dark of his room had fought for its head and got it. All he could do was sit in the saddle and hope for the best. But at least it would be a breath-taking ride; a unique, heart-stopping ride. Danger to life and limb he was used to; but far more exciting was this new mental danger, this pitting of wits.

This danger to his immortal soul, the orphanage would call it. But he had never believed in his immortal soul.

He couldn't go to Latchetts as a blackmailer, he wouldn't go as a suppliant, he would damn well go as an invader.

The telegraph wires swooped and the earth whirled round the carriage window; and Bee's mind swooped and whirled with them.

"I would have come down to see you, of course," Mr. Sandal had said on the telephone. "It is against all my principles to deal with such grave matters by telephone. But I was afraid that my presence might suggest to the children that there was something serious afoot. And it would be a pity to upset them if there is a chance that-that the trouble is temporary."

Poor dear old Sandal. He had been very kind; had asked her if she were sitting down, before he broke the news; and had said: "You're not feeling faint, are you. Miss Ashby?" when his shock had been administered.

She had not fainted. She had sat for a long time letting her knees get back their strength, and then she had gone to her room and looked for photographs of Patrick. Except for a studio group taken when Simon and Patrick were ten and Eleanor nine, she seemed to have nothing. She was not a snapshot-keeper.

Nora had been a passionate collector of her children's photographs, but she had spurned photograph albums, which she held to be "a great waste of time and space." (Nora had never wasted anything; it had been as if she was half conscious that her allotted time was short.) She had kept them all in a tattered and bursting manila envelope with O.H.M.S. on it, and the envelope went everywhere with her. It had gone to Europe on that holiday with her, and had made part of that blaze on the Kent coast.

Balked of photographs, Bee went up to the old nursery, as if there she would get nearer to the child Patrick, although she knew very well that nothing of Patrick's remained there. Simon had burned them all. It was the only sign he had given that his twin's death was more than he could well bear. Simon had gone away to school after Patrick's death, and when he came back for the summer holidays he had behaved normally, if one took it for granted that not mentioning Patrick was in the circumstances normal enough. And then one day Bee had come on him tending a bonfire where the children had made their "Red Indian" and campfires, beyond the shrubbery, and on the fire were Patrick's toys and other small belongings. Even exercise books, she noticed, had been brought down to feed the flames. Books and childish paintings and the silly horse that had hung at the end of his bed; Simon was burning them all.

He had been furious when he saw her. He had moved between her and the fire, standing at bay, as it were, and glared at her.

"I don't want them around," he had said, almost shouting.

"I understand, Simon," she had said, and had gone away.

So there was nothing of Patrick in the old nursery under the eaves; and not very much of the other children, after all. When this had been Bee's own nursery it had been ugly and individual and furnished largely with rejections from the other parts of the house. It had patterned linoleum, and a rag rug, and a cuckoo clock, and crazy basket chairs, and a clothes-horse, and a deal table covered with a red rep tablecloth trimmed with bobbles and marked with ink-stains; and coloured prints of «Bubbles» and similar masterpieces hung against a cabbage-rose wallpaper. But Nora had done it over, so that it became an illustration from a homemaker magazine, in powder-blue and white, with a wallpaper of nursery-rhyme characters. Only the cuckoo clock had stayed.

The children had been happy there, but had left no mark on it. Now that it was empty and tidy, it looked just like something in a furniture shop window.

She had gone back to her own room, baffled and sick at heart, and had packed a small bag for her use in the morning. To-morrow she must go up to town and face this new emergency in the history of the Ashbys.

"Do you believe, yourself, that it is Patrick?" she had asked.

But Mr. Sandal could give her no assurance.

"He has not the air of a pretender," he allowed. "And if he is not Patrick, then who is he? The Ashby family resemblance has always been abnormally strong. And there is no other son of this generation."

"But Patrick would have written," she said.

That is the thought she always went back to. Patrick would never have left her in grief and doubt all those years. Patrick would have written. It couldn't be Patrick.

Then if it wasn't Patrick, who was it?

Round and round went her mind, swooping and whirling.

"You will be the best judge," Mr. Sandal had said. "Of those now living you are the one who knew the boy best."

"There is Simon," she had said.

"But Simon was a boy at the time and boys forget, don't they? You were grown up."

So the onus was being put upon her. But how was *she* to know? She who had loved Patrick but now could hardly remember what he looked like at thirteen. What test would there be?

Or would she know at once when she saw him that he was Patrick? Or that he-wasn't?

And if he wasn't and yet insisted that he was, what would happen? Would he bring a claim? Make a court action of it? Drag them all through the publicity of the daily Press?

And if he was Patrick, what of Simon? How would he take the resurrection of a brother he had not seen for eight years? The loss of a fortune. Would he be glad about it, fortune or no, or would he hate his brother?

The coming-of-age celebrations would have to be postponed, that was clear. They were much too close now for anything to be decided by that time. What excuse should they make?

But oh, if it *could*, by some miracle, be Patrick, she would be free of that haunting horror, that thought of the boy who regretted too late to come back.

Her mind was still swooping and swirling as she climbed the stairs to the offices of Cosset, Thring and Noble.

"Ah, Miss Ashby," Mr. Sandal said. "This is a shocking dilemma. A most unprecedented — Do sit down. You must be exhausted. A

dreadful ordeal for you. Sit down, sit down. Mercer, some tea for Miss Ashby."

"Did he say why he didn't write, all those years?" she asked; this being the all-important thing in her mind.

"He said something about 'perhaps preferring to be dead'."

"Oh."

"A psychological difficulty, no doubt," Mr. Sandal said, proffering comfort.

"Then you believe it is Patrick?"

"I mean, if it is Patrick, his 'preferring to be dead' would no doubt arise from the same psychological difficulty as did his running away."

"Yes. I see. I suppose so. Only-it is so unlike Patrick. Not to write, I mean."

"It was unlike Patrick to run away."

"Yes; there is that. He certainly wasn't a runner-away by nature. He was a sensitive child but very brave. Something must have gone very wrong." She sat silent for a moment. "And now he is back."

"We hope so; we hope so."

"Did he seem quite normal to you?"

"Excessively," said Mr. Sandal, with a hint of dryness in his tone.

"I looked for photographs of Patrick, but there is nothing later than this." She produced the studio group. "The children had studio portraits taken regularly every three years, from the time they were babies. This was the last of them. The new one would have been taken in the summer of the year that Bill and Nora were killed; the year Patrick-disappeared. Patrick is ten there."

She watched while Mr. Sundal studied the small immature face.

"No," he said at last. "It is impossible to say anything from so early a photograph. As I said before, the family likeness is very strong. At that age they are just young Ashbys, aren't they? Without any great individuality." He looked up from studying the photograph and went on: "I am hoping that when you yourself see the boy-the young man-you will have no doubt one way or another. After all, it is not entirely a matter of likeness, this recognition, is it? There is an aura of-of personality."

"But-but if I am not sure? What is to happen if I am not sure?"

"About that: I think I have found a way out. I dined last night with my young friend Kevin Macdermott."

"The K.C.?"

"Yes. I was greatly distressed, of course, and told him of my difficulty, and he comforted me greatly by assuring me that identification would be a quite simple matter. It was merely an affair of teeth."

"Teeth? But Patrick had quite ordinary teeth."

"Yes, yes. But he had no doubt been to a dentist, and dentists have records. Indeed, most dentists have a sort of visual memory, I understand, of mouths they have treated-a very grim thought-and would almost recognise one at sight. But the record will certainly show — "He caught the look on Bee's face and paused. "What is the matter?"

"The children went to Hammond."

"Hammond? Well? That is simple, isn't it? If you don't definitely identify the boy as Patrick, we have only to — " He broke off. "Hammond!" he said quietly. "Oh!"

"Yes," Bee said, agreeing with the tone of the monosyllable.

"Dear me, how unfortunate. How very unfortunate."

Into the subsequent silence Mr. Sandal said miserably: "I think I ought to tell you that Kevin Macdermott thinks the boy is lying."

"What could Mr. Macdermott possibly know about it," said Bee angrily. "He has not even seen him!" And as Mr. Sandal went on sitting in miserable silence, "Well?"

"It was only Kevin's opinion on the hypothesis."

"I know, but why did he think that?"

"He said it was a-a 'phoney thing to come straight to a lawyer'."

"What nonsense! It was a very sensible thing to do."

"Yes. That was his point. It was too sensible. Too pat. Everything, Kevin said, was too pat for his liking. He said a boy coming home after years away would go home."

"Then he doesn't know Patrick. That is just what Patrick would have done: broken it gently by going to the family lawyer first. He was always the most thoughtful and unselfish of creatures. I don't think much of the clever Mr. Macdermott's analysis."

"I felt it only right to tell you everything," Mr. Sandal said, still miserably.

"Yes, of course," Bee said kindly, recovering her temper. "Did you tell Mr. Macdermott that Patrick-that the boy had remembered crying at Olympia? I mean, that he had volunteered the information."

"I did; yes."

"And he still thought the boy was lying?"

"That was part of the 'patness' he professed not to like."

Bee gave a small snort. "What a mind!" she said. "I suppose that is what a court practice does."

"It is a detached mind, that is all. One not emotionally engaged in the matter, as we are. It behooves us to keep our minds detached."

"Yes, of course," Bee said, sobered. "Well, now that poor old Hammond is to be no help to us-they never found him, did you know? Everything was just blown to dust."

"Yes. Yes, so I heard; poor fellow."

"Now that we have no physical evidence, I suppose we have to rely on the boy's own story. I mean, on checking it. I suppose that can be done."

"Oh, quite easily. It is all quite straightforward, with dates and places. That is what Kevin found so — Yes. Yes. Of course it can be checked. And of course I am sure that it *will* check. He would not have offered us information which would be proved nonsense."

"So really there is nothing to wait for."

"No, I — No."

Bee braced herself.

"Then how soon can you arrange for me to meet him?"

"Well-I have been thinking about it, and I don't think, you know, that it should be arranged at all."

"What?"

"What I should like to do-with your permission and co-operation-would be to, as it were, walk in on him. Go and see him unannounced. So that you would see him as he is and not as he wants you to see him. If we made an appointment here at the office, he would — "

"Yes, I see. I understand. I agree to that. Can we go now?"

"I don't see why not. I really don't see why not," Mr. Sandal said in that regretful tone that lawyers use when they cannot see any reason why not. "There is, of course, the chance that he may be out. But we can at least go and see. Ah, here is your tea! Will you drink it while Mercer asks Simspon to ask Willett to get us a taxi?"

"You haven't got anything stronger, have you?" Bee asked.

"I'm afraid not; I'm afraid not. I have never succumbed to the transatlantic custom of the bottle in the office. But Willett will get you anything you may — "

"Oh, no, thank you; it's all right. I'll drink the tea. They say the effects are much more lasting, anyway."

Mr. Sandal looked as though he would like to pat her encouragingly on the shoulder, but could not make up his mind to it. He was really a very kind little man, she thought, but just-just not much of a *prop*.

"Did he explain why he chose the name Farrar?" she asked, when they were seated in the taxi.

"He didn't explain anything," Mr. Sandal said, falling back on his dry tone.

"Did you gather that he was badly off?"

"He did not mention money, but he seemed very well-dressed in a slightly un-English fashion."

"There was no suggestion of a loan?"

"Oh, no. Oh, dear me, no."

"Then he hasn't come back just because he is broke," Bee said, and felt somehow pleased. She sat back and relaxed a little. Perhaps everything was going to be all right.

"I have never quite understood why Pimlico descended so rapidly in the social scale," said Mr. Sandal, breaking the silence as they travelled down the avenues of pretentious porches. "It has fine wide streets, and little through-traffic, and no more smuts than its neighbours. Why should the well-to-do have deserted it and yet stayed in Belgravia? Very puzzling."

"There is a sort of suction about desertion," Bee said, trying to meet him on the small-talk level. "The local Lady Almighty occasions the draught by leaving, and the rest, in descending order of importance, follow in her wake. And the poorer people flood in from either side to fill the vacuum. Is this the place?"

Her dismay took possession of her again as she looked at the dismal front of the house; at the peeling paint and the stained stucco, the variety of drab curtains at the windows, the unswept doorway and the rubbed-out house-number on the horrible pillar.

The front door was open and they walked in.

A different card on each door in the hallway proclaimed the fact that the house was let out in single rooms.

"The address is 59K," Mr. Sandal said. "I take it that K is the number of the room."

"They begin on the ground floor and work upwards," Bee said. "This is B on my side." So they mounted.

"H," said Bee, peering at a first-floor door. "It's up the next flight."

The second floor was also the top one. They stood together on the dark landing listening to the silence. He is out, she thought, he is out, and I shall have to go through all this again.

"Have you a match?" she said.

"I and J," she read, on the two front-room doors.

Then it was the back one.

They stood in the dark for a moment, staring at it. Then Mr. Sandal moved purposively forward and knocked.

"Come in!" said a voice. It was a deep, boy's voice; quite unlike Simon's light sophisticated tones.

Bee, being half a head taller than Mr. Sandal, could see over his shoulder; and her first feeling was one of shock that he should be so much more like Simon than Patrick ever was. Her mind had been filled with images of Patrick: vague, blurred images that she strove to make clear so that she could compare them with the adult reality. Her whole being had been obsessed with Patrick for the last twenty-four hours.

And now here was someone just like Simon.

The boy got up from where he had been sitting on the edge of the bed, and with no haste or embarrassment pulled from off his left hand the sock he had been darning. She couldn't imagine Simon darning a sock.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning," said Mr. Sandal. "I hope you don't mind: I've brought you a visitor." He moved aside to let Bee come in. "Do you know who this is?"

Bee's heart hammered on her ribs as she met the boy's light calm gaze and watched him identify her.

"You do your hair differently," he said.

Yes, of course; hairdressing had changed completely in those eight years; of course he would see a difference.

"You recognise her, then?" Mr. Sandal said.

"Yes, of course. It's Aunt Bee."

She waited for him to come forward to greet her, but he made no move to. After a moment's pause he turned to find a seat for her.

"I'm afraid there is only one chair. It is all right if you don't lean back on it," he said, picking up one of those hard chairs with a

black curved back and a tan seat with small holes in it. Bee was glad to sit down on it.

"Do you mind the bed?" he said to Mr. Sandal.

"I'll stand, thank you, I'll stand," Mr. Sandal said hastily.

The details of the face were not at all like Simon's, she thought; watching the boy stick the needle carefully in the sock. It was the general impression that was the same; once you really looked at him the startling resemblance vanished, and only the family likeness remained.

"Miss Ashby could not wait for a meeting at my office, so I brought her here," Mr. Sandal said. "You don't seem particularly — "He allowed the sentence to speak for itself.

The boy looked at her in a friendly unsmiling way and said: "I'm not very sure of my welcome."

It was a curiously immobile face. A face like a child's drawing, now she came to think of it. Everything in the right place and with the right proportions, but without animation. Even the mouth had the straight uncompromising line that is a child's version of a mouth.

He moved over to lay the socks on the dressing-table, and she saw that he was lame.

"Have you hurt your leg?" she asked.

"I broke it. Over in the States."

"But should you be walking about on it if it is still tender?"

"Oh, it doesn't hurt," he said. "It's just short."

"Short! You mean, permanently short?"

"It looks like it."

They were sensitive lips, she noticed, for all their thinness; they gave him away when he said that.

"But something can be done about that," she said. "It just means that it was mended badly. I expect you didn't have a very good surgeon."

"I don't remember a surgeon. Perhaps I passed out. They did all the correct things: hung weights on the end of it, and all that."

"But Pat — " she began, and failed to finish his name.

Into the hiatus he said: "You don't have to call me anything until you are sure."

"They do miracles in surgery nowadays," she said, covering her break. "How long ago is it since it happened?"

"I'd have to think. About a couple of years now, I think."

Except for the flat American *a*, his speech was without peculiarity.

"Well, we must see what can be done about it. A horse, was it?"

"Yes. I wasn't quick enough. How did you know it was a horse?"

"You told Mr. Sandal that you had worked with horses. Did you enjoy that?" Just like railway-carriage small-talk, she thought.

"It's the only life I do enjoy."

She forgot about small-talk. "Really?" she said, pleased. "Were they good horses, those western ones?"

"Most of them were commoners, of course. Very good stuff for their work-which, after all, is being a good horse, I suppose. But every now and then you come across one with blood. Some of those are beauties. More-more individual than I ever remember English horses being."

"Perhaps in England we 'manner' the individuality out of them. I hadn't thought of it. Did you have a horse of your own at all?"

"Yes, I had one. Smoky."

She noticed the change in his voice when he said it. As audible as the flat note in the cracked bell of a chime.

"A grev?"

"Yes, a dark grey with black points. Not that hard, iron colour, you know. A soft, smoky colour. When he had a tantrum he was just a whirling cloud of smoke."

A whirling cloud of smoke. She could see it. He must love horses to be able to see them like that. He must particularly have loved his Smoky.

"What happened to Smoky?"

"I sold him."

No trespassers. Very well, she would not trespass. He had probably had to sell the horse when he broke his leg,

She began to hope very strenuously that this was Patrick.

The thought recalled her to the situation which she had begun to lose sight of. She looked doubtfully at Mr. Sandal.

Catching the appeal in her glance, Mr. Sandal said: "Miss Ashby is no doubt prepared to vouch for you, but you will understand that the matter needs more clarification. If it were a simple matter of a prodigal's homecoming, your aunt's acceptance of you would no doubt be sufficient to restore you to the bosom of your family. But in the present instance it is a matter of property. Of the ultimate destination of a fortune. And the law will require incontrovertible evidence of your identity before you could be allowed to succeed to anything that was Patrick Ashby's. I hope you understand our position."

"I understand perfectly. I shall, of course, stay here until you have made your inquiries and are satisfied."

"But you can't stay here," Bee said, looking with loathing at the room and the forest of chimney-pots beyond the window.

"I have stayed in a great many worse places."

"Perhaps. That is no reason for staying here. If you need money we can give you some, you know."

"I'll stay here, thanks."

"Are you just being independent?"

"No. It's quiet here. And handy. And bung full of privacy. When you have lived in bunk houses you put a high value on privacy."

"Very well, you stay here. Is there anything else we can-can stake you to?"

"I could do with another suit."

"Very well. Mr. Sandal will advance whatever you need for that." She suddenly remembered that if he went to the Ashby tailor there would be a sensation. So she added: "And he will give you the address of his tailor."

"Why not Walters?" said the boy.

For a moment she could not speak.

"Aren't they there any more?"

"Oh, yes; but there would be too many explanations if you went to Walters." She must keep a hold on herself. Anyone could find out who the Ashby tailor had been.

"Oh, yes. I see."

She fell back on small-talk and began to take her leave.

"We have not told the family about you," she said, as she prepared to go. "We thought it better not to, until things are-are what Mr. Sandal calls clarified."

A flash of amusement showed in his eyes at that. For a moment they were allied in a secret laughter.

"I understand."

She turned at the door to say good-bye. He was standing in the middle of the room watching her go, leaving Mr. Sandal to shepherd her out. He looked remote and lonely. And she thought: "If this *is* Patrick, Patrick come home again, and I am leaving him like this, as if he were a casual acquaintance — " It was more than she could bear, the thought of the boy's loneliness.

She went back to him, took his face lightly in her gloved hand, and kissed his cheek. "Welcome back, my dear," she said.

So Cosset, Thring and Noble began their investigations, and Bee went back to Latchetts to deal with the problem of postponing the coming-of-age celebrations.

Was she to tell the children now, before the thing was certain? And if not, what excuse could she possibly put forward for not celebrating at the proper time?

Mr. Sandal was against telling the children yet. The unknown Kevin's verdict had left a mark on him, it seemed; and he was entirely prepared to find a flaw in the so-complete dossier that had been handed to them. It would be inadvisable, he thought, to bring the children into this until the claim had been sifted through the finest mesh.

With that she agreed. If this thing passed-if that boy in the back room in Pimlico was not Patrick-they need never know anything about it. Simon would probably have to be told, so that he could be warned against future attempts at fraud, but by that time it would be of no more than academic interest; a quite impersonal affair. Her present difficulty was how to reconcile the children's ignorance with the postponing of the celebrations.

The person who rescued her from this dilemma was Great-uncle Charles, who cabled to announce his (long overdue) retirement, and his hope to be present at his great-nephew's coming-of-age party. He was on his way home from the Far East, and, since he refused to fly, his home-coming was likely to be a protracted one, but he hoped Simon would keep the champagne corked till he came.

Great-uncles do not normally cut much ice in the families in which they survive, but to the Ashbys Great-uncle Charles was much more than a great-uncle: he was a household word. Every birthday had been made iridescent and every Christmas a tingling expectation by the thought of Great-uncle Charles's present. There were reasonable bounds to the possible presents of parents; and Father Christmas's were merely the answer to indents.

But neither reason nor bounds had any connection with presents from Great-uncle Charles. Once he had sent a set of chopsticks, which upset nursery discipline for a week. And once it had been the skin of a snake; the glory of owning the skin of a snake had made Simon dizzy for days. And Eleanor still ran to and from her bath in a pair of odd-smelling leather slippers that had come on her twelfth birthday. At least four times every year Great-uncle Charles became the most important factor in the Ashby family; and when you have been of first importance four times a year for twenty years your importance is pretty considerable. Simon might grumble and the others protest a little, but they would without doubt wait for Great-uncle Charles.

Besides, she had a shrewd idea that Simon would not be willing to offend the last-surviving Ashby of his generation. Charles was not rich-he had been far too liberal a giver all his life-but he was comfortably off; and Simon, for all his careless good nature and easy charm, was an exceedingly practical person.

So the postponement was taken by the family with resignation, and by Clare with equanimity. It was held to be a very proper thing that the Ashbys should wait until the old boy could be present. Bee spent her after-dinner leisure altering the date on the invitation cards, and thanking heaven for the mercifulness of chance.

Bee was at odds with herself these days. She wanted this boy to be Patrick; but it would be so much better for all concerned, she felt, if he proved not to be Patrick. Seven-eighths of her wanted Patrick back; warm, and alive, and dear; wanted it passionately. The other eighth shrank from the upheaval of the happy Ashby world that his return would bring with it. When she caught this renegade eighth at its work she reproved it and was suitably ashamed of herself; but she could not destroy it. And so she was distrait and short-tempered, and Ruth, commenting on it to Jane, said:

"Do you think she can have a Secret Sorrow?"

"I expect the books won't balance," Jane said. "She's a very bad adder-up."

Mr. Sandal reported from time to time on the progress of the investigations, and the reports were uniform and monotonous. Everything seemed to confirm the boy's story.

"The most heartening thing, using the word in its sense of reassurance," Mr. Sandal said, "is that the young man seems to have no contacts since he came to England. He has lived at that address since the *Philadelphia's* arrival, and he has had neither letters nor visitors. The woman who owns the house occupies one of the front rooms on the ground floor. She is one of those women who has nothing to do but sit back and watch her neighbours. The lives of her tenants seem to be an open book to the good lady. She is also accustomed to waiting for the postman and collecting the letters he drops. Nothing escapes her. Her description of myself was, I understand, hardly flattering but quite touching in its fidelity. The young man could therefore have hardly had visitors without her being aware of it. He was out all day, of course; as any young man in London would be. But there is no trace of that intimacy which would suggest connivance. He had no friends."

The young man came willingly to the office and answered questions freely. With Bee's consent, Kevin Macdermott had "sat in" at one of these office conferences, and even Kevin had been shaken. "What shakes me," Kevin had said, "is not the fellow's knowledge of the subject-all good con. men are glib-but the general cut of his jib. He's quite frankly not what I expected. After a little while in my job you develop a smell for a wrong 'un. This chap has me baffled. He doesn't smell like a crook to me, and yet the set-up stinks."

So the day came when Mr. Sandal announced to Bee that Cosset, Thring and Noble were now prepared to accept the claimant as Patrick Ashby, the eldest son of William Ashby of Latchetts, and to hand over to him everything that was due to him. There would be legal formalities, of course, since the fact of his death eight years ago had been presumed; but they would be automatic. As far as they, Cosset, Thring and Noble, were concerned, Patrick Ashby was free to go home whenever he pleased.

So the moment had come, and Bee was faced with breaking the news to the family.

Her instinct was to tell Simon first, privately; but she felt that anything that set him apart from the others in this matter of welcoming back his brother was to be avoided. It would be better to take for granted that for Simon, as for the others, the news would

be a matter for unqualified happiness.

It was after lunch on a Sunday that she told them.

"I have something to tell you that will be rather a shock to you. But a nice kind of shock," she said. And went on from there. Patrick had not committed suicide, as they had thought. He had merely run away. And now he had come back. He had been living for a little in London because, of course, he had to prove to the lawyers that he was Patrick. But he had had no difficulty in doing that. And now he was going to come home.

She had avoided looking at their faces as she talked; it was easier just to talk into space, impersonally. But in the startled silence that followed her story she looked across at Simon; and for a moment did not recognise him. The shrunk white face with the blazing eyes had no resemblance to the Simon she knew. She looked away hastily.

"Does it mean that this new brother will get all the money that is Simon's?" asked Jane, with her usual lack of finesse.

"Well, I think it was a horrible thing to do," Eleanor said bluntly.

"What was?"

"Running away and leaving us all thinking he was dead."

"He didn't know that, of course. I mean: that we would take his note to mean that he was going to kill himself."

"Even so. He left us all without a word for-for-how long is it? Seven years? Nearly eight years. And then comes back one day without warning, and expects us to welcome him."

"Is he nice?" asked Ruth.

"What do you mean by nice?" Bee asked, glad for once of Ruth's interest in the personal.

"Is he nice to look at? And does he talk nicely or has he a frightful accent?"

"He is exceedingly nice to look at, and he has no accent whatsoever."

"Where has he been all this time?" Eleanor asked.

"Mexico and the States, mostly."

"Mexico!" said Ruth. "How romantic! Does he wear a black sailor hat?"

"A what? No, of course he doesn't. He wears a hat like anyone else."

"How often have you seen him, Aunt Bee?" Eleanor asked.

"Just once. A few weeks ago."

"Why didn't you tell us about it then?"

"It seemed better to wait until the lawyers were finished with him and he was ready to come home. You couldn't all go rushing up to London to see him."

"No, I suppose not. But I expect Simon would have liked to go up and see him, wouldn't you, Simon, and we wouldn't have minded? After all, Patrick was his twin."

"I don't believe for one moment that it is Patrick," Simon said, in a tight, careful voice that was worse than shouting.

"But, Simon!" Eleanor said.

Bee sat in a dismayed silence. This was worse than she had anticipated.

"But, Simon! Aunt Bee has seen him. She must know."

"Aunt Bee seems to have adopted him."

Much worse than she had anticipated.

"The people who *have* adopted him, Simon, are Cosset, Thring and Noble. A not very emotional firm, I think you'll agree. If there had been the faintest doubt of his being Patrick, Cosset, Thring and Noble would have discovered it during those weeks. They have left no part of his life since he left England unaccounted for."

"Of *course* whoever it is has had a life that can be checked! What did they expect? But what possible reason can they have for believing that he is Patrick?"

"Well, for one thing, he is your double."

This was clearly unexpected. "My double?" he said vaguely.

"Yes. He is even more like you than when he went away."

The colour had come back to Simon's face and the stuff on the bones had begun to look like flesh again; but now he looked stupid, like a boxer who is taking too much punishment.

"Believe me, Simon dear," she said, "it is Patrick!"

"It isn't. I know it isn't. You are all being fooled!"

"But, Simon!" Eleanor said. "Why should you think that? I know it won't be easy for you to have Patrick back-it won't be easy for any of us-but there's no use making a fuss about it. The thing is there and we just have to accept it. You are only making things worse by trying to push it away."

"How did this-this creature who says he is Patrick, how did he get to Mexico? How did he leave England? And when? And where?"

"He left from Westover in a ship called the Ira Jones."

"Westover! Who says so?"

"He does. And according to the harbourmaster, a ship of that name did leave Westover on the night that Patrick went missing."

Since this seemed to leave Simon without speech, she went on: "And everything he did from then on has been checked. The hotel he worked at in Normandy is no longer there, but they have found the ship he sailed from Havre in-it's a tramp, but it belongs to a firm in Brest-and people have been shown photographs and identified him. And so on, all the way back to England. Till the day he walked into Mr. Sandal's office."

"Is that how he came back?" Eleanor asked. "Went to see old Mr. Sandal?"

"Yes."

"Well, I should say that proves that he is Patrick, if anyone is in any doubt about it. But I don't know why there should be doubt at

all. After all, it would be very easy to catch him out if he wasn't Patrick, wouldn't it? All the family things he wouldn't know...."

"It isn't Patrick."

"It is a shock for you, Simon, my dear," Bee said, "and, as Eleanor says, it won't be easy for you. But I think it will be easier when you see him. Easier to accept him, I mean. He is so undeniably an Ashby, and so very like you."

"Patrick wasn't very like me."

Eleanor saved Bee from having to reply to that. "He was, Simon. Of course he was. He was your twin."

"If *I* ran away for years and years, would you believe I was me, Jane?" Ruth asked.

"You wouldn't stay away for years and years, anyhow," Jane said.

"What makes you think I wouldn't?"

"You'd come home in no time at all."

"Why would I come home?"

"To see how everyone was taking your running away."

"When is he coming, Aunt Bee?" Eleanor asked.

"On Tuesday. At least that is what we had arranged. But if you would like to put it off a little-until you grow more used to the idea, I mean...." She glanced at Simon, who was looking sick and baffled. In her most apprehensive moments she had never pictured a reaction as serious as this.

"If you flatter yourself that I shall grow used to the idea, you are wrong," Simon said. "It makes no difference to me when the fellow comes. As far as I'm concerned he is not Patrick and he never will be."

And he walked out of the room. Walking, Bee noticed, not very steadily, as if he were drunk.

"I've never known Simon like that before," Eleanor said, puzzled.

"I should have broken it to him differently. I'm afraid it is my fault. I just-didn't want to make him different from anyone else."

"But he loved Patrick, didn't he? Why shouldn't he be glad about it? Even a *little* glad!"

"I think it is horrid that someone can come and take Simon's place, without warning, like that," Jane said. "Simply horrid. And I don't wonder that Simon is angry."

"Aunt Bee," said Ruth, "can I wear my blue on Tuesday when Patrick comes?"

Bee waited till Evensong would be over, and then walked across the fields to the Rectory. Ostensibly, she was going to tell them the news; actually she was going to pour out her troubles to George Peck. When George could withdraw his mind sufficiently from the classic world to focus it on the present one, he was a comfortable person to talk to. Unemotional and unshockable. Bee supposed that an intimate acquaintance with classic on-goings, topped-off with a cure of souls in a country parish, had so conditioned him to shocks that he had long ago become immune from further attack. Neither ancient iniquity nor modern English back-sliding surprised him. So it was not to Nancy, her friend, that she was taking her unquiet heart, but to the Rector. Nancy would wrap her round with warm affection and sympathy, but it was not sympathy she needed; it was support. Besides, if she was to find understanding it would not be with Nancy, who had forgotten Patrick's very existence, but with George Peck, who would most certainly remember the boy he had taught.

So she walked in the sunlight over the fields, through the church-yard, and into the Rectory garden through the little iron gate that had caused that terrific row in 1723. Very peaceful it all was to-night, and very peaceful were the rival smiths, sleeping within twelve feet of each other over there in the corner in good Clare earth. Some day quite soon, she thought, pausing with her hand on the delicate iron scroll, my trouble too will be just an old song; one must try to keep things in proportion. But it was her head talking to her heart, and her heart would not listen.

She found the Rector where she knew he would be. Always after Evensong it was his habit to go and stare at something in the garden; usually at something at the farther end of the garden from which he could not be too easily recalled to the trivialities of social obligation. This evening he was staring at a purple lilac and polluting the fragrant air with a pipe that smelt like a damp bonfire. "There should be a by-law against pipes like George's," his wife had said, and the present sample was no exception. It depressed Bee still further.

He glanced up as she came down the path and went back to staring at the lilac. "Wonderful colour, isn't it," he said. "Odd to think that it is just an optical illusion. What colour is a lilac when you are not looking at it, I wonder?"

Bee remembered that the Rector had once broken it to the twins that a clock does not tick if no one is in the room. She had found Ruth being surreptitious in the hall, and Ruth, when asked what this noiseless progress was occasioned by, had said that she was "trying to sneak up on the drawing-room clock." She wanted to catch it not ticking.

Bee stood by the Rector in silence for a little, looking at the glory and trying to arrange her thoughts. But they would not arrange.

"George," she said at length, "you remember Patrick, don't you?"

"Pat Ashby? Of course." He turned to look at her.

"Well, he didn't die at all. He just ran away. That is what the note meant. And he is coming back. And Simon isn't pleased." A great round shameless tear slipped out of her eye and ran down her cheek. She brushed it off her chin and went on staring at the lilac.

George extended a bony forefinger and gently speared the front of her shoulder with it.

"Sit down," he said.

She sat down on the seat behind her, under the arch of the young green honeysuckle, and the Rector sat down beside her. "Now, tell me," he said; and she told him. All the bewildering story, in the proper order and with full detail; Mr. Sandal's telephone call, the journey to town, the top-floor-back in Pimlico, the investigations of Cosset, Thring and Noble, the rescue by Great-uncle Charles, the ultimate facing of the facts and announcing them to the family, the family reaction.

"Eleanor is a little cold about it, but reasonable as she always is. The thing is there and she is going to make the best of it. Jane, of course, is partisan, and sorry for Simon, but she will get over that when she meets her brother in the flesh. She is a friendly soul by nature."

"And Ruth?"

"Ruth is planning her wardrobe for Tuesday," Bee said tartly.

The Rector smiled a little. "The happy ones of the earth, the Ruths."

"But Simon.... How can one account for Simon?"

"I don't think that that is very difficult, you know. Simon would have had to be a saint to welcome back a brother who was going to supplant him. A brother, moreover, who has been dead to him since the age of thirteen."

"But, George, his twin! They were inseparable."

"I think that thirteen is further removed from twenty-one than almost any other equidistant points in life. It is a whole lifetime away. An association that ended at thirteen has little but sentimental value for the boy of twenty-one. Latchetts has been Simon's forwhat is it? — eight years; he has known for eight years that he would come into his mother's money at twenty-one: to be deprived of all that without warning would upset a stronger character than Simon's."

"I expect I did it badly," Bee said. "The way I told them, I mean. I should have told Simon first, privately. But I did so want to keep them all on the same level. To pretend that they would all be equally glad. Taking Simon apart and telling him before the others would have-would have — "

"Anticipated the trouble."

"Yes. Something like that, I suppose I suppose I had known quite well that his reaction would be-different from the others. And I just wanted to minimise the difference. I had never imagined for a moment, you see, that his reaction would be so violent. That he would go to the length of denying that Patrick was alive."

"That is only his method of pushing the unwelcome fact away from him."

"Unwelcome," Bee murmured.

"Yes, unwelcome. And very naturally unwelcome. You make things difficult for yourself if you don't accept that fundamental fact. *You* remember Patrick with your adult mind, and are rejoiced that he is still alive." He turned his head to look at her. "Or-are you?"

"Of course I am!" she said, a shade too emphatically. But he let it go.

"Simon doesn't remember him with an adult mind or adult emotions. To Simon he is a remembered emotion; not a present one. He has no present love to fight his present-hatred with."

"Oh, George."

"Yes; it is best to face it. It would take an almost divine love to combat the resentment that Simon must be feeling now; and there has never been anything in the least divine about Simon. Poor Simon. It is a wretched thing to have happened to him."

"And at the very worst moment. When we were all ready for celebration."

"At least this is the answer to something that has puzzled me for eight years."

"What is that?"

"The fact of Patrick's suicide. I could never reconcile it with the Patrick I knew. Patrick was a sensitive child, but he had a tremendous fund of good common sense; a balance. A far better equilibrium, for instance, than the less sensitive but more brilliant Simon. He had also, moreover, a great sense of obligation. If Latchetts was suddenly and unaccountably his he might be overwhelmed to the point of running away, but not unbalanced to the point of taking his life."

"Why did we all so unquestioningly accept the suicide theory?"

"The coat on the cliff-top. The note-which did read like a suicide one, undoubtedly. The complete lack of anyone who had seen him after old Abel met him between Tanbitches and the cliff. The persistence with which suicides use that particular part of the coast for their taking-off. It was the natural conclusion to come to. I don't remember that we ever questioned it. But it had always stayed in my mind as an unaccountable thing. Not the method, but the fact that Patrick should have taken his own life. It was unlike everything I knew about Patrick. And now we find that, after all, he did no such thing."

"I shut my eyes and the lilac is no colour; I open them and it is purple," Bee was saying to herself; which was her way of keeping her tears at bay. Just as she counted objects when in danger of crying at a play.

"Tell me, are you pleased with this adult Patrick who has come back?"

"Yes. Yes, I am pleased. He is in some ways very like the Patrick who went away. Very quiet. Self-contained. Very considerate. Do you remember how Patrick used to turn and say: 'Are you all right? before he began whatever he was planning to do on his own? He still thinks of the other person. Didn't try to-rush me, or take his welcome for granted. And he still keeps his bad times to himself. Simon always came flying to one with his griefs and grievances, but Patrick dealt with his own. He seems still to be able to deal with his own."

"Has he had a bad time, then, do you think?"

"I gather it hasn't been a bed of roses. I forgot to tell you that he is lame."

"Lame!"

"Yes. Just a little. Some accident with a horse. He is still mad about horses."

"That will make you happy," George said. He said it a little wryly, being no horseman.

"Yes," agreed Bee with a faint smile for the wryness. "It is good that Latchetts should go to a real lover."

"You rate Simon as a poor lover?"

"Not poor. Indifferent, perhaps. To Simon horses are a means of providing excitement. Of enhancing his prestige. A medium for trade; for profitable dickering. I doubt if it goes further than that. For horses as-people, if you know what I mean, he has little feeling. Their sicknesses bore him. Eleanor will stay up for nights on end with a horse that is ill, sharing the nursing fifty-fifty with Gregg. The only time Simon loses sleep is when a horse he wants to ride, or jump, or hunt, has a 'leg'."

"Poor Simon," the Rector said reflectively. "Not the temperament to make a successful fight against jealousy. A very destructive emotion indeed, jealousy."

Before Bee could answer, Nancy appeared.

"Bee! How nice," she said. "Were you at Evensong, and did you see the latest contingent from our local school for scandalisers? Two adolescents who are 'studying the prevalent English superstitions': to wit, the Church of England. A boy, very hairy for fourteen, it seemed to me; and a girl with eleven combs keeping up her not very abundant wisps. What would you say a passion for combs was an indication of? A sense of insecurity?"

"Beatrice has come with a very wonderful piece of news," the Rector said.

"Don't tell me Simon has got himself engaged."

"No. It is not about Simon. It's about Patrick."

"Patrick?" Nancy said uncertainly.

"He is alive." And he told her how.

"Oh, Bee, my dear," Nancy said, putting her arms round her friend, "how glorious for you. Now you won't have to wonder any more."

That Nancy's first reaction was to remember that private nightmare of hers broke Bee down altogether.

"You need a drink," Nancy said, briskly. "Come along in and we'll finish what's left in the sherry bottle."

"A deplorable reason for drinking sherry," the Rector said.

"What is?"

"That one 'needs a drink'."

"An even more deplorable reason is that if we don't drink it Mrs. Godkin will. She has had most of the rest of the bottle. Come along."

So Bee drank the Rectory sherry and listened while George enlightened Nancy on the details of Patrick Ashby's return. Now that her weight of knowledge was shared with her own generation, the burden was suddenly lighter. Whatever difficulties lay ahead, there Would be George and Nancy to support and comfort her.

"When is Patrick coming?" Nancy asked; and the Rector turned to Bee.

"On Tuesday," Bee told them. "What I can't decide is the best way of spreading the news in the district."

"That's easy," Nancy said. "Just tell Mrs. Gloom."

Mrs. Gloom kept the sweets-tobacco-and-newspaper shop in the village. Her real name was Bloom, but her relish for disaster caused her to be known, first by the Ledingham and Ashby children, and later by all and sundry, as Mrs. Gloom.

"Or you could send yourself a postcard. The post office is almost as good. That is what Jim Bowden did when he jilted the Heywood girl. Sent his mother a telegram announcing his wedding. The fuss was all over before he came back."

"I'm afraid we are going to be at the exact centre of the fuss until the nine days' wonder is over," Bee said. "One must just put up with it."

"Ah, well, my dear, it's a *nice* sort of fuss," Nancy said, comforting.

"Yes. But the situation is so-so incalculable. It's like-like — '

"I know," Nancy said, agreeing. "Like walking on jelly."

"I was going to say picking one's way over a bog, but I think the jelly is a better description."

"Or one of those uneven floors at fun fairs," the Rector said unexpectedly, as Bee took her leave.

"How do you know about fun fairs, George?" his wife asked.

"They had one at the Westover Carnival a year or two ago, I seem to remember. A most interesting study in masochism."

"You see now why I have stuck to George," Nancy said, as she walked with Bee to the garden gate. "After thirteen years I am still finding out things about him. I wouldn't have believed that he even knew what a fun fair was. Can you picture George lost in contemplation of the Giant Racer?"

But it was not of Nancy's George that she was thinking as she walked away through the churchyard, but of the fun-fair floor that she was doomed to walk in the days ahead. She turned in at the south porch of the church and found the great oak door still unlocked. The light of the sunset flooded the grey vault with warmth, and the whole building held peace as a cup holds water. She sat down on a bench by the door and listened to the silence. A companionable silence which she shared with the figures on the tombs, the tattered banners, the names on the wall, the Legion's garish Union Jack, and the slow ticking of a clock. The tombs were all Ledingham ones: from the simple dignity of the Crusader to the marble family that wept with ostentatious opulence over the eighteenth-century politician. The Ashbys had no crusaders and no opulence. Their memorials were tablets on the wall. Bee sat there and read them for the thousandth time. "Of Latchetts" was the refrain. "Of Latchetts in this parish." No field-marshals, no chancellors, no poets, no reformers. Just the yeoman simplicity of Latchetts; the small-squire sufficiency of Latchetts.

And now Latchetts belonged to this unknown boy from half a world away.

"A great sense of obligation," the Rector had said, speaking of the Patrick he remembered. And that had been the Patrick that she, too, remembered. And that Patrick would have written to them.

Always she came back to that in her mind. The Patrick they knew would never have left them in grief and doubt for eight years.

"Some psychological difficulty," Mr. Sandal had said. And after all, he *had* run away. A sufficiently unlikely thing for Patrick to do. Perhaps he had been overcome by shame when he came to himself.

And vet. And vet.

That kind child who so automatically asked: "Are you all right?"

That child with the "great sense of obligation"?

And while Bee sat and stared at the Ashby tablets in the church at Clare, Brat Farrar was standing in the back room in Pimlico in a brand-new suit and a state of panic.

How had he got himself into this? What could he have been thinking of? He, Brat Farrar. How did he ever think that he could go through with it? How had he ever in the first place consented to lend himself to such a plan?

It was the suit that had shocked him into realisation. The suit was wrong-doing made concrete and manifest. It was a wonderful suit. The kind of suit that he had dreamed of possessing; so unremarkable, so unmistakable once you had remarked it: English tailoring at its unobtrusive best. But he stood looking at himself in the mirror in a kind of horror.

He couldn't do it, that was all. He just couldn't do it.

He would duck, before it was too late.

He would send back the goddamned suit to the tailor, and send a letter to that woman who had been so nice, and just duck out of sight.

"What!" said the voice. "And pass up the greatest adventure of your life? The greatest adventure that has happened to any man within living memory?"

"Adventure my foot. It's plain false pretences."

They wouldn't bother to look for him. They would be too relieved to have him out of their hair. He could duck without leaving a ripple.

"And leave a fortune behind?" said the voice.

"Yes, and leave a fortune behind. Who wants a fortune, anyhow?"

They would have his letter to insure them against any further nuisance from his side, and they would just let him go. He would write to that woman who, because she was kind, had kissed him before she was sure, and confess, and say he was sorry, and that would be that

"And pass up the chance of owning a stud?"

"Who wants a stud? The world's lousy with horses."

"And you are going to own some, perhaps?"

"I may, some day. I may."

"Pigs may fly."

"Shut up."

He would write to Loding and tell him that he would be no party to his criminal schemes.

"And waste all that knowledge? All that training?"

"I should never have started it."

"But you did start it. You finished it. You are primed to the gills with knowledge worth a fortune. You can't waste it, surely!"

Loding would have to whistle for that fifty per cent. How could he ever have thought of letting himself be an instrument in the hands of a crook like Loding!

"A very amusing and intelligent crook. On the highest level of crookery. Nothing to be ashamed of, believe me."

He would go to a travel agency to-morrow morning and get a berth out of the country. Anywhere out of the country.

"I thought you wanted to stay in England?"

He would put the sea between him and temptation.

"Did you say temptation? Don't tell me that you're still wavering!"

He hadn't enough left for a fare to America, but he had enough to take him quite a distance. The travel agency would offer him a choice of places. The world was wide and there was a lot of fun left in it. By Tuesday morning he would be out of England, and this time he would stay out.

"And never see Latchetts at all?"

He would find some — "What did you say?"

"I said: And never see Latchetts at all?"

He tried to think of an answer.

"Stumped you, haven't I!"

There must be an answer.

"Money, and horses, and fun, and adventure are common change. You can have them anywhere in the world. But if you pass up Latchetts now you pass it up for good. There won't be any going back."

"But what has Latchetts to do with me?"

"You ask that? You, with your Ashby face, and your Ashby bones, and your Ashby tastes, and your Ashby colouring, and your Ashby blood."

"I haven't any evidence at all that — "

"And your Ashby blood, I said. Why, you poor little brute of a foundling, Latchetts is your belonging-place, and you have the immortal gall to pretend that you don't care a rap about it!"

"I didn't say I didn't care. Of course I care."

"But you'll walk out of this country to-morrow, and leave Latchetts behind? For always? Because that is what it amounts to, my boy. That is the choice before you. Take the road of high adventure and on Tuesday morning you will see Latchetts. Duck, and you will

never see it at all."

"But I'm not a crook! I can't do something that is criminal."

"Can't you? You've been giving a pretty good imitation of it these last few weeks. And enjoying it too. Remember how you enjoyed that tight-rope business on that first visit to old Sandal? How you enjoyed all the others? Even with a K.C. sitting across the table and doing a sort of mental X-ray on you. You loved it. All that is wrong with you just now is cold feet. Nerves. You want to see Latchetts as you have never wanted anything before. You want to live at Latchetts as an Ashby. You want horses. You want adventure. You want a life in England. Go to Latchetts on Tuesday and they are all yours."

"But —

"You came half across the world to that meeting with Loding. Was that just chance? Of course not. It was all meant. Your destiny is at Latchetts. Your destiny. What you were born for. Your destiny. At Latchetts. You're an Ashby. Half across a world to a place you never heard of. Destiny. You can't pass up destiny...."

Brat got slowly out of the brand-new suit, and hung it up with orphanage neatness on its fine new hanger. Then he sat down on the edge of his bed and buried his face in his hands.

He was still sitting there when the darkness came.

11

It was a beautiful day, the day that Brat Farrar came to Latchetts, but a restless little wind kept turning the leaves over so that in spite of the sunlight and the bright air the world was filled with a vague unease and a promise of storm.

"Much too shiny!" thought Bee, looking at the landscape from her bedroom window after breakfast. "Tears before night, as Nanny used to say of too exuberant children. However. At least he will arrive in sunshine."

She had been greatly exercised in her mind over that arrival. It was to be as informal as possible; that was a thing that was agreed to by all concerned. Someone would meet him at the station and bring him home, and there would be luncheon with only the family present. The question was: Who was to meet him? The twins had held that the whole family should go to the station, but that, of course, was not to be thought of. The prodigal could hardly be welcomed publicly on the platform at Guessgate for the entertainment of the railway staff and casual travellers between Westover and Bures. She herself could not go without giving the returning Patrick an air of being her protege; which was something to be avoided at all costs. She had not forgotten Simon's sneer about her «adoption» of Patrick. Simon-the obvious choice for the role of welcomer-was not available; since her announcement on Sunday he had slept at home but had not otherwise taken part in Latchetts activities, and Bee's attempt to talk to him in his room late on Monday night had been furile

So she had been relieved when Eleanor offered to drive the four miles to the station at Guessgate and bring Patrick back.

The present load on her mind was that family meal after his arrival. If Simon did not turn up how was his absence to be explained? And if he did turn up what was that lunch going to be like?

She turned to go down for one more rehearsal with the cook-their third cook in the last twelve months-when she was waylaid by Lana, their "help." Lana came from the village, and had gilt hair and varnished fingernails and the local version of the current make-up. She «obliged» only because her «boy-friend» worked in the stables. She would sweep and dust, she explained when she first came, because that was "all right," but she would not wait at table because that was "menial." Bee had longed to tell her that no one with her hands, or her breath, or her scent, or her manners, would ever be allowed to hand an Ashby a plate; but she had learned to be politic. She explained that there was, in any case, no question of waiting at table; the Ashbys always waited on themselves.

Lana had come to say that the "vacuum was vomiting instead of swallowing," and domestic worries closed once more over Bee's head and swamped domestic drama. She came to the surface in time to see Eleanor getting into her little two-seater.

"Aren't you taking the car?" she asked. "The car" was the family vehicle, Eleanor's disreputable little conveyance being known as "the bug."

"No. He'll have to take us as we are," Eleanor said.

Bee noticed that she had not bothered to change into a dress. She was wearing the breeches and gaiters in which she had begun the morning.

"Oh, take me, take me!" Ruth said, precipitating herself down the steps and on to the car, but taking good care, Bee noticed, to keep "her blue" away from the bug's dusty metal.

"No," Eleanor said firmly.

"I'm sure he would like me to be there. One of my generation, I mean. After all, he knows you. It won't be exciting for him to see you the way it would be for him to see — "

"No. And keep off if you don't want that dazzling outfit of yours to be mucked up."

"I do think it is selfish of Eleanor," Ruth said, dusting her palms as she watched the car grow small between the lime trees. "She just wants to keep the excitement to herself."

"Nonsense. It was arranged that you and Jane should wait here. Where is Jane, by the way?"

"In the stables, I think. She isn't interested in Patrick."

"I hope she comes in in good time for lunch."

"Oh, she will. She may not be interested in Patrick, but she is always ready for her meals. Is Simon going to be there, at lunch?" "I hope so."

"What do you think he will say to Patrick?"

If the peace and happiness of Latchetts was going to break down into a welter of discord the twins must go away to school. They would be going to school in a year or two, anyhow; they had much better go now than live in an atmosphere of strain and hatred.

"Do you think there will be a scene?" Ruth asked, hopefully.

"Of course not, Ruth. I wish you wouldn't dramatise things."

But she wished, too, that she could count on there being no scene. And Eleanor, on her way to the station, was wishing the same thing. She was a little nervous of meeting this new brother, and annoyed with herself for being nervous. Her everyday clothes were her protest against her own excitement: a pretence that nothing of real moment was about to happen.

Guessgate, which served three villages but no town, was a small wayside station with a fairly heavy goods business but little passenger traffic, so that when Brat climbed down from his carriage there was no one on the platform but a fat countrywoman, a sweating porter, the ticket-collector, and Eleanor.

"Hullo," she said. "You are very like Simon." And she shook hands with him. He noticed that she wore no make-up. A little powdering of freckles went over the bridge of her nose.

"Eleanor," he said, identifying her.

"Yes. What about your luggage? I have just the small car but the dickey holds quite a lot."

"I have just this," he said, indicating his "grip."

"Is the rest coming later?"

"No, this is all I possess."

"Oh." She smiled just a little. "No moss."

"No," he said, "no moss," and began to like her very much.

"The car is out in the yard. Through this way."

"Been away, Mr. Ashby?" the ticket-collector said, accepting his piece of pasteboard.

"Yes, I've been away."

At the sound of his voice the ticket-collector looked up, puzzled.

"He took you for Simon," Eleanor said, as they got into the car; and smiled properly. Her two front teeth crossed just a little; which gave her face an endearing childishness. It was a cool, determined, small face when she was serious. "You couldn't have come home at a better time of the year," she said, as they scrunched over the gravel of the station yard and fled away into the landscape.

"Home," he thought. Her hair was the colour of corn so ripe that it was nearly white. Pale, silky stuff, very fine. It was brushed back into a knot, as if she could not be bothered to do anything else with it.

"The blossom is just beginning. And the first foals are here."

The knees in their worn whipcord were just like a boy's. But the bare arms protruding from the jacket she wore slung over her shoulders were delicately round.

"Honey has a filly foal that is going to make history. Wait till you see it. You won't know Honey, of course. She was after your time. Her real name is Greek Honey. By Hymettus out of a mare called Money For Jam. I hope you will be impressed with our horses."

"I expect to be," he said.

"Aunt Bee says that you're still interested in them. Horses, I mean."

"I haven't done much on the breeding side, of course. Just preparing horses for work."

They came to the village.

So this was Clare. This warm, living, smiling entity was what those little flat squares on the map had stood for. There was the White Hart; there was the Bell. And up there behind, on its knoll, was the church where the Ashby tablets hung.

"The village is looking nice, isn't it?" Eleanor said. "Not changed a bit since I can remember. Not changed since the Flood, if it comes to that. The names of the people in the houses come in the same order down the street as they did in the time of Richard the Second. But of course you know that! I keep thinking of you as a visitor."

Beyond the village, he knew, were the great gates of Clare Park. He waited, mildly curious, to see the entrance to what had been Alec Loding's home. It proved to be a sweeping curve of iron lace flanked by two enormous pillars bearing on each a lion passant. Astride the farther lion was a small boy clad in a leopard-skin rug with green baize edging, a seaside pail worn helmet-wise, and nothing else that was visible. A very long brass poker stood up lance-wise from its rest on his bare foot.

"It's all right," Eleanor said. "You did see it."

"That comforts me quite a bit."

"Did you know that Clare was a school nowadays?"

He had nearly said yes, when he remembered that this was merely one of the things Loding had told him, not one of the things that he was supposed to know.

"What kind of school?"

"A school for dodgers."

"Dodgers?"

"Yes. Anyone who loathes hard work and has a parent with enough money to pay the fees makes a bee-line for Clare. No one is forced to learn anything at Clare. Not even the multiplication table. The theory is that one day you'll feel the need of the multiplication table and be seized with a mad desire to acquire the nine-times. Of course, it doesn't work out like that at all."

"Doesn't it?"

"Of course not. No one who could get out of the nine-times would ever dream of acquiring it voluntarily."

"And if they don't do lessons what do they do all day?"

"Express their personalities. They draw things; or make things; or whitewash the coach-house; or dress up, like Antony Toselli. That was Tony on the lion. I teach some of them to ride. They like that. Riding, I mean. I think they are so bored with easy things that they find something a little difficult simply fascinating. But of course it has to be something out of the ordinary. The difficult thing, I mean. If it was a difficulty that everyone was supposed to overcome they wouldn't be interested. That would bring them down to the common level of you and me. They wouldn't be 'different' any longer."

"Nice people."

"Very profitable to Latchetts, anyhow. And here is Latchetts."

Brat's heart rose up into his throat. Eleanor turned slowly into the white gateway between the limes.

It was just as well that she was going slowly, for she had no sooner entered the green tunnel than something like a giant blue butterfly shot out from the boles of the trees and danced wildly in front of the car.

Eleanor braked and swore simultaneously.

"Hullo! Hullo!" shouted the butterfly, dancing to Brat's side of the car.

"You little idiot," Eleanor said. "You deserve to be killed. Don't you know that a driver doesn't see well coming into the avenue out of the sunlight?"

"Hullo! Hullo, Patrick! It's me! Ruth. How d'you do. I came to ride up with you. To the house, you know. Can I sit on your knee? There isn't very much room in that awful old car of Eleanor's, and I don't want to crush my dress. I hope you like my dress. It is put on specially for your coming home. You're very good-looking, aren't you? Am I what you expected?"

She waited for an answer to that, so Brat said that he hadn't really thought about it.

"Oh," said Ruth, much dashed. "We thought about you," she said reprovingly. "No one has talked about anything else for days."

"Ah well," Brat said, "when you have run away for years and years people will talk about you."

"I shouldn't dream of doing anything so outre," Ruth said, unforgiving.

"Where did you get that word?" Eleanor asked.

"It's a very good word. Mrs. Peck uses it."

Brat felt that he ought to paint in a little local colour by saying: "How are the Pecks, by the way?" But he had no mind to spare for artifice. He was waiting for the moment when the limes would thin out and he would see Latchetts.

For the moment when he would be face to face with his "twin."

"Simon hasn't come back yet," he heard Ruth say; and saw her sideways glance at Eleanor. The glance, even more than the information, shook him.

So Simon wasn't waiting on the doorstep for him. Simon was «away» somewhere and the family was uneasy about it.

Alec Loding had disabused him of the idea that a feudal staff reception would await him at Latchetts; that there would be a line of servants, headed by the butler and descending in strict order to the latest tweeny, to welcome the Young Master to the ancestral home. That, Loding had said, had gone out with bustles, and Latchetts had never had a butler, anyhow. And he had known, too, that there would be no array of relations. The children's father had been an only son with one sister, Aunt Bee. The children's mother had been an only daughter with two brothers: both of them killed by the Germans before they were twenty. The only near Ashby relation was Great-uncle Charles, reported by Loding to be now nearing Singapore.

But it had not occurred to him that all the available Ashbys might not be there. That there might be dissenters. The ease of his meeting with Eleanor had fooled him. Metaphorically speaking, he picked up the reins that had been lying on his neck.

The car ran out of the thin spring green of the avenue into the wide sweep in front of the house, and there in the too-bright gusty sunlight stood Latchetts; very quiet, very friendly, very sure of itself. The gabled front of the original building had been altered by some eighteenth-century Ashby to conform with the times, so that only the tiled roof showed its age and origin. Built in the last days of Elizabeth, it was now blandly "Queen Anne." It stood there in its grasslands, undecorated and sufficient; needing no garden for its enhancement. The green of the small park flowered at its heart into the house itself, and any other flowering would have been redundant.

As Eleanor swept round towards the house, Brat saw Beatrice Ashby come out on to the doorstep, and a sudden panic seized him; a mad desire to blurt out the truth to her and back out there and then; before he had put foot over the doorstep; before he was definitely «on» in the scene. It was going to be a damnably difficult and awkward scene and he had no idea how to play it.

It was Ruth who saved him from the worst moment of awkwardness. Before the car had come to a halt she was piping her triumph to the world, so that Brat's arrival somehow took second place to her own achievement.

"I met him after all, Aunt Bee! I met him after all. I came up from the gate with them. You don't mind, do you? I just strolled down as far as the gate and when I got there I saw them coming, and they stopped and gave me a lift and here we are and so I met him after all."

She linked her arm through Brat's and tumbled with him out of the car, dragging him behind her as if he were a find of her own. So that it was with a mutual shrug for this display of personality that Brat and Bee greeted each other. They were united for the moment in a rueful amusement, and by the time the amusement had passed so had the moment.

Before awkwardness could come flooding back, there was a second distraction. Jane came riding round the corner of the house on Fourposter on her way to the stables. The instant check of her hands on the reins when she saw the group at the door made it obvious that she had not planned on being one of that group. But it was too late now to back out, even if backing out had been possible. It was never possible to back away from anything that Fourposter might happen to be interested in; he had no mouth and an insatiable curiosity. So forward came the reluctant Jane on a highly interested pony. As Fourposter came to a halt she slid politely to the ground and stood there shy and defensive. When Bee introduced her she laid a small limp hand in Brat's and after a moment withdrew it.

"What is your pony's name?" Brat asked, aware of her antagonism.

"That's Fourposter," Ruth said, appropriating Jane's mount. "The Rector calls him the Equine Omnibus."

Brat put out his hand to the pony, who refused the advance by withdrawing a pace and looking contemptuously down his Roman nose. As a gesture it was pure burlesque; a Victorian gesture of repudiation from a Victorian drama.

"A comedian," remarked Brat; and Bee, delighted with his perception, laughed.

"He doesn't like people," Jane said, half-repressive, half-defending her friend.

But Brat kept his hand out, and presently Fourposter's curiosity overcame his stand-offishness and he dropped his head to the waiting hand. Brat made much of him, till Fourposter capitulated entirely and nuzzled him with elephantine playfulness.

"Well!" said Ruth, watching. "He never does that to anyone!"

Brat looked down into the small tight face by his elbow, at the small grubby hands clutching the reins so tightly.

"I expect he does to Jane when no one is around," he said.

"Jane, it is time you were cleaned up for lunch," Bee said, and turned to lead the way indoors.

And Brat followed her, over the threshold.

"I have put you in the old night nursery," Bee said. "I hope you don't mind. Simon has the room that he used to share with-that you used to share with him." Oh, dear, what a gaffe, she thought; shall I ever be able to think of him as Patrick? "And to give you one of the spare rooms was to treat you like a visitor."

Brat said that he would be glad to have the night nursery.

"Will you go up now, or will you have a drink first?"

"I'll go up now," Brat said, and turned to the stairway.

He knew that she had been waiting for this moment; waiting for the moment when he must show knowledge of the house. So he turned from her and led the way upstairs; up to the big first landing and down the narrow corridor to the north wing, and to the children's rooms facing west from it. He opened the third of the four doors and stood in the room that Nora Ashby had arranged for her children when they were small. One window looked west over the paddocks and the other north to the rise of the down. It was on the quiet side of the house, away from the stables and the approach from the road. He stood at the window looking at the soft blue English distances, thinking of the brilliant mountains beyond the whirling dust of the West, and very conscious of Bee Ashby behind him.

There was something else that he must take the initiative about.

"Where is Simon?" he said, and turned to face her.

"He is like Jane," she said. "Late for lunch. But he'll be in at any moment."

It was smoothly done, but he had seen her shy at his unheralded question, as if he had flicked a whip. Simon had not come to meet him; Simon had not been at Latchetts to greet him; Simon, it was to be deduced, was being difficult.

Before he could pursue the subject she took the initiative from him.

"You can have the nursery bathroom all to yourself, but *do* go slow on the hot water, will you? Fuel is a dreadful problem. Now wash and come down at once. The Pecks sent over some of the Rectory sherry."

"Aren't they coming to lunch?"

"No, they're coming to dinner to-night. Lunch is for family only."

She watched him turn to the fourth door, which he knew to be the bathroom of the nursery wing, and went away looking comforted. He knew why she was comforted: because he had known his way about the house. And he felt guilty and ill at ease. Fooling Mr. Sandal-with a K.C. sitting opposite you and gimletting holes in you with cynical Irish eyes-had been one thing; fooling Mr. Sandal had been fun. But fooling Bee Ashby was another thing altogether.

He washed absentmindedly, turning the soap in his hands with his eyes on the line of the down. There was the turf he had wanted to ride on; the turf he had sold his soul for. Presently he would get a horse and go up there and ride in the quiet, away from human relationships and this fantastic game of human poker, and up there it would once more seem right and worth while.

He went back to his room and found a brassy blonde in tight flowered rayon tweaking the wallflower in the bowl on the window-

"Hullo," said the blonde. "Welcome home, and all that."

"Thanks," Brat said. Was this someone that he should know? Surely not!

"You're very like your brother, aren't you?"

"I suppose so." He took his brushes from his «grip» and put them on the dressing-table; it was a symbolical taking-possession.

"You won't know me, of course. I'm Lana Adams from the village. Adams the joiner was my father. I oblige because my boy-friend works in the stables."

So that is what she was: the help. He looked at her and was sorry for the boy-friend.

"You look a lot older than your brother, don't you? I suppose it's knocking about the world that does it. Having to look out for yourself, and all that. Not being spoilt like your brother. You'll excuse me saying it but spoilt he is. That's why he's made all this to-do about you coming back. Silly, I call it. You've only to look at you to know that you're an Ashby. Not much point in saying you're not, I should think. But you take my tip and stand up to him. He can't stand being stood up to. Been humoured all his life, I should say. Don't let it get you down."

As Brat went silently on with his unpacking, she paused; and before she could resume Eleanor's cool voice said from the doorway: "Have you everything you want?"

The blonde said hastily: "I was just welcoming Mr. Patrick back," and, having flung Brat a radiant smile, made a hip-swing exit from the room.

Brat wondered how much Eleanor had heard.

"It's a nice room this," Eleanor said, "except that it doesn't get the morning sun. That bed is from Clare Park. Aunt Bee sold the little ones and bought that one at the Clare sale. It's nice, isn't it? It was the one in Alec Ledingham's room. Except for that the room is just the same."

"Yes; the old wallpaper, I notice."

"Robinson Crusoe and company. Yes. I had a great weakness for Hereward the Wake. He had such an enchanting profile." She pointed to Hereward's place in the pattern of fictional heroes that Nora had chosen for her children's nightly entertainment.

"Is the nursery-rhyme paper still next door?"

"Yes, of course. Come and see."

He went with her, but while she rehearsed the pictured tales his mind was busy with the village girl's revelation about Simon and with the ironic fact that he was to sleep in Alec Loding's bed.

So Simon had refused to believe that he was Patrick. "Not much point in saying you're not, I should think." That could only mean that Simon, in the face of all the evidence, refused to accept him.

Why?

He followed Eleanor downstairs, still wondering.

Eleanor led him into a big sunny sitting-room where Bee was pouring sherry, and Ruth was picking out a tune on a piano.

"Would you like to hear me play?" Ruth asked, inevitably.

"No," Eleanor said, "he wouldn't. We've been looking at the old wallpapers," she said to Bee. "I'd forgotten how in love with Hereward I used to be. It's just as well that I was removed from him in time or he might have become a fixation or something."

"I never *liked* that baby stuff on the walls," Ruth said.

"You never read, so you couldn't know anything about them," Eleanor said.

"We gave up using the nursery wing when the twins ceased to have a Nanny," Bee said. "It was too far away from the rest of the house."

"It was a day's march to call the twins in the morning," Eleanor said, "and as Ruth always needed calling several times we had to move them into the normal family orbit."

"Delicate people need more sleep," Ruth said.

"Since when have you been delicate?" asked Eleanor.

"It's not that I'm delicate but that Jane's more robust, aren't you, Jane?" she said, appealing to Jane, who sidled into the room, the hair at her temples still damp from her hasty ablutions.

But Jane's eyes were on Bee.

"Simon is here," she said in a small voice; and crossed the room to stand near Bee as if for reassurance.

There was an instant of complete silence. In the moment of suspended animation only Ruth moved. Ruth sat up and sparkled with anticipation.

Then Bee's hand moved again and went on filling the glasses. "That is very nice," she said. "We needn't keep luncheon back after all."

It was so beautifully done that Brat, knowing what he knew now, felt like applauding.

"Where is Simon?" Eleanor asked casually.

"He was coming downstairs," Jane said; and her eyes went back to Bee.

The door opened and Simon Ashby came in.

He paused a moment, looking across at Brat, before closing the door behind him. "So you've come," he said.

There was no emphasis on the words; no apparent emotion in the tone.

He walked slowly across the room until he was standing face to face with Brat by the window. He had abnormally clear grey eyes with a darker rim to the iris, but they had no expression in them. Nor had his pale features any expression. He was so tightly strung, Brat thought, that if you plucked him with a finger he would twang.

And then quite suddenly the tightness went.

He stood for a moment searching Brat's face; and his own was suddenly slack with relief.

"They won't have told you?" he said, drawling a little, "but I was prepared to deny with my last breath that you were Patrick. Now that I've seen you I take all that back. Of course you are Patrick." He put out his hand. "Welcome home."

The stillness behind them broke in a flurry of movement and competing voices. There was a babble of mutual congratulation, of chinking glasses and laughter. Even Ruth, it seemed, stifled her disappointment at being done out of melodrama, and devoted her talents to wheedling a little more sherry into her glass than the «sip» that was the twins' allowance for health-drinking.

But Brat, drinking the golden liquid and thanking heaven that the moment was over, was puzzled. Why relief? he was thinking.

What had Ashby expected? What had he been afraid of?

He had denied the possibility of Brat's being Patrick. Had that been just a defence against hope; an insurance against ultimate disappointment? Had he said to himself: I won't believe that Patrick is alive, and so when it is proved that he isn't I won't have hoped for nothing? And was that overwhelming relief a moment ago due merely to the realisation that he was after all Patrick?

It didn't fit.

He watched Simon being the life of the party, and wondered about him. A few moments ago Ashby had been steeled to face something, and now it seemed he had been-let off. That was it. That was what that sudden relief had been. The reaction of someone steeled to face the worst and suddenly reprieved.

Why should he feel reprieved?

He took the small puzzle into luncheon with him, and it lay at the back of his mind while he dealt with the problems of Ashby conversation and answered their crowding questions.

"You're in!" gloated the voice inside him. "You're in! You're sitting as of right at the Ashby table, and they're all tickled to death about it."

Well, perhaps not all. Jane, loyal to Simon, was a small silent oasis in the right talk. And it was not to be expected that Simon himself, for all his capitulation, was tickled to any great extent. But Bee, entirely uncritical of that capitulation, was radiant: and Eleanor melted moment by moment from conversational politeness to a frank interest.

"But a Comanche bridle is a kind of twitch, isn't it?"

"No; just a gag. The rope goes through the mouth the way a bit does. It's best for a led horse. He'll follow to lessen the pull."

Ruth, having quite forgiven his lack of speculation about her looks, paid assiduous court to him; and she was the only one who called him Patrick.

This became more noticeable as the meal went on, and her continual interjection of "Patrick!" as she claimed his attention contrasted with the others' half-conscious avoidance of the name. Brat wished that his sole «follower» had proved to be Jane and not Ruth. If he had ever had a small sister he would have liked her to be just like Jane. It annoyed him that he had difficulty in meeting

Jane's eyes. It cost him the same effort to meet her regard with equanimity as it did to meet the eyes of the portrait behind her. The dining-room was positively papered with portraits, and the one behind Jane was of William Ashby the Seventh, wearing the uniform of the Westover Fencibles, in which he had proposed to resist the invasion of Napoleon the First. Brat had learned those portraits off by heart, sitting under the pagoda in Kew Gardens, and every time he lifted his eyes to those of William Ashby the Seventh he was plagued by the ridiculous notion that William knew all about the pagoda.

One thing helped him enormously, however, in this first difficult meeting with the Ashbys. The tale he had to tell, as Loding had pointed out during that meal at the Green Man, was, except for its beginnings, true; it was the tale of his own life. And since the whole family with one accord avoided any reference to the events which had catapulted him into that life, the conversational ground he moved on was firm. There was need for neither side-stepping nor manoeuvre.

Nor was there any need for him to "mind his manners"; and for that too Alec Loding had given loud thanks. It seemed that, short of a first-class and very strict Nanny, there was no more rigorous training in the civilised consumption of food than was to be had at a first-class orphanage. "My God," Loding had said, "if I ever have any change from a round of drinks I'll send it to that caravanserai of yours, as a mark of my gratitude that you were not brought up in some genteel suburb. Gentility is practically ineradicable, my boy. And whatever Pat Ashby might conceivably do, it is quite inconceivable that he should ever stick out his little finger when he drank."

So Brat had no social habits to unlearn. Indeed, his orthodoxy slightly disappointed Ruth, always on the lookout for the flamboyant.

"You don't eat with your fork," she said; and when he looked puzzled, added: "The way they do in American pictures; they cut things up with their knives and forks and then they change the fork over to their other hand and eat with it."

"I don't chew gum either," he pointed out.

"I wonder how that very elaborate method of dealing with their food arose," Bee said.

"Perhaps knives were scarce in the early days," Eleanor suggested.

"Knives were far too useful to be scarce in a pioneer society," Simon said. "It's much more likely that they lived so long on hash that when they got things in slices their instinct was to make hash of it as soon as possible."

Brat thought, listening to them, how very English it all was. Here he was, back from the dead, and they were calmly discussing American table manners. There was no backslapping, congratulatory insistence on the situation as there would be in a transatlantic household. They avoided the do-you-remember theme as determinedly as Americans would have wallowed in it. Remembering his friends of the Lazy Y, he thought what a fine exhibition of Limey snootiness this would be from the point of view of Pete, and Hank, and Lefty.

But perhaps the happiness on Bee's face would have impressed even Lefty.

"Do you smoke?" Bee asked, when she had poured the coffee; and she pushed the cigarette box over to him. But Brat, who liked his own brand, took out his case and offered the contents to her.

"I've given them up," Bee said. "I have a bank balance instead."

So Brat offered the case to Eleanor.

Eleanor paused with her fingers touching the cigarettes, and bent forward to read something engraved on the inside of the case.

"Brat Farrar," she said. "Who is that?"

"Me," said Brat.

"You? Oh, yes; Farrar, of course. But why Brat?"

"I don't know."

"Did they call you that? Brat, I mean?"

"Yes."

"Why Brat?"

"I don't know. Because I was small, I guess."

"Brat!" Ruth said delighted. "Do you mind if I call you Brat? Do you?"

"No. I haven't been called anything else for a large part of my life."

The door opened and Lana appeared to say that a young man had called to see Miss Ashby and she had put him in the library.

"Oh, what a nuisance," Bee said. "What does he want, do you know?"

"He says he's a reporter," Lana said, "but he doesn't look like a reporter to me. Quite tidy and clean and polite." Lana's experience of the Press, like Brat's knowledge of middle-class life, was derived solely from films.

"Oh, no!" Bee said. "Not the Press. Not already."

"The Westover Times he says he is."

"Did he say why he had come?"

"Come about Mr. Patrick, of course," Lana said, turning her thumb in Patrick's direction.

"Oh, God," Simon groaned, "and the fatted calf not half-way down our gullets. I suppose it had to come sooner or later!"

Bee drank the remains of her coffee. "Come on, Brat!" she said, putting out her hand and pulling him to his feet. "We might as well go and get it over. You too, Simon." She led Brat out of the room, laughing at him, and still hand in hand with him. The warm friendliness of her clasp sent a rush of emotion through him that he could not identify. It was like nothing he had so far experienced in life. And he was too busy with thoughts of the reporter to pause to analyse it.

The library was the dark room at the back of the house where Bee kept her roll-top desk, her accounts, and her reference books. A small young man in a neat blue suit was puzzling over a stud book. At their entrance he dropped the book and said in a rich Glasgow accent: "Miss Ashby? My name is Macallan. I'm working on the *Westover Times*. I'm awfully sorry about barging in like this, but I thought you'd have finished eating this long time."

"Well, we began late, and I'm afraid we lingered over things," Bee said.

"Uh-huh," said Mr. Macallan understandingly. "A very special occasion. I've no right to be spoiling it for you, but 'the first with the latest' is my motto, and just this minute you're the latest."

"I suppose you mean my nephew's homecoming."

"Just that."

"And how did you find out about it so soon, Mr. Macallan?"

"One of my contacts heard about it in one of the Clare pubs."

"A deplorable word," said Bee.

"Pub?" Mr. Macallan said, puzzled.

"No. Contact."

"Och, well, one of my stooges, if you like that better," Mr. Macallan said agreeably. "Which of these young gentlemen is the returned prodigal, may I ask?"

Bee introduced Brat and Simon. Some of the cold tightness had come back to Simon's face; but Brat, who had been around when Nat Zucco had cut his throat in the kitchen of his ex-wife's eating-house and had witnessed the activities of the American Press on that occasion, was entranced by this glimpse of news-gathering in Britain. He answered the obvious questions put to him by Mr. Macallan and wondered if there would be any suggestion of a photograph. If so, he must get out of it somehow.

But it was Bee who saved him from that. No photograph, said Bee. No; positively *no* photograph. All the information he liked to ask for, but no photograph.

Mr. Macallan accepted this, but reluctantly. "The story of the missing twin won't be half so good without a photograph," he complained.

"You're not going to call it 'The Missing Twin, are you?" Bee said.

"No; he's going to call it 'Back From The Dead'," Simon said, speaking for the first time. His cool drawl fell on the room like a shadow.

Mr. Macallan's pale blue eyes went to him, rested a moment on him consideringly, and then came back to Bee. "I had thought of 'Sensation at Clare'," he said, "but I doubt the Westover Times won't stand for it. A very conservative organ. But I expect the Daily Clarion will do better."

"The *Clarion*!" Bee said. "A London paper! But-but I hope there is no question of that. This is an entirely local-an entirely family matter."

"So was that affair in Hilldrop Crescent," Mr. Macallan said.

"What affair?"

"Crippen was the name. The world's Press is composed of family affairs, Miss Ashby."

"But this is of no possible interest to anyone but ourselves. When my nephew-disappeared, eight years ago, the *Westover Times* reported it quite-quite incidentally."

"Ay, I know. I looked it up. A small paragraph at the bottom of page three."

"I fail to see why my nephew's return should be of any more interest than his disappearance."

"It's the man-bites-dog affair over again. People go to their deaths every day, but the amount of people who come back from the dead is very small indeed, Miss Ashby. Coming back from the dead, in spite of the advances of modern science, is still a sensation. And that's why the *Daily Clarion* is going to be interested."

"But how should they hear about it?"

"Hear about it!" Mr. Macallan said, genuinely horrified. "Miss Ashby, this is my own scoop, don't you see."

"You mean you are going to send the story to the *Clarion*?"

"Assuredly."

"Mr. Macallan, you mustn't; you really must not."

"Listen, Miss Ashby," Mr. Macallan said patiently, "I agreed about the no-photographs prohibition, and I respect the agreement-I won't go sneaking around the countryside trying to snap the young gentlemen unawares, or anything like that-but you can't ask me to give up a scoop like this. Not a scoop of 'London daily' dimensions." And as Bee, caught in the toils of her natural desire to be fair, hesitated, he added: "Even if I didn't send them the story, there's nothing to hinder a sub-editor lifting the story from the *Westover Times* and making it front-page news. You wouldn't be a scrap better off and I'd have lost my chance of doing a bit of good for myself."

"Oh, dear," Bee said, tacitly acknowledging that he was right, "I suppose that means swarms of newspaper men from London."

"Och, no. Only the *Clarion*. If it's the *Clarion*'s story none of the rest will bother. And whoever they send down you don't have to worry. They're all Balliol men, I understand."

With which flip at the English Press, Mr. Macallan looked round for his hat and made motions of departure.

"I'm very grateful to you, and to you, Mr. Ashby, for being so accommodating in the matter of information. I won't keep you any longer. May I offer you my congratulations on your happiness"-for a second the pale blue eyes rested in mild benevolence on Simon-"and my thanks for your kindness."

"You're a long way from home, aren't you, Mr. Macallan?" Bee said conversationally as she went to the front door with him.

"Home?"

"Scotland."

"Oh, I see. How did you know I was Scots? Oh, my name, of course. Ay, it's a far cry to Glasgow; but this is just the long way round to London, so to speak. If I'm going to work on an English paper it's as well to know something of the-the — "

"Aborigines?" suggested Bee.

"Local conditions, I was going to say," Mr. Macallan said solemnly.

"Haven't you a car?" Bee said, looking at the empty sweep in front of the door.

"I left it parked at the end of your drive there. I've never got used to sweeping up to strange houses as if I owned them."

With which startling exhibition of modesty the little man bowed, put on his hat, and walked away.

In the library, as the voices of Bee and Mr. Macallan faded down the hall and into the out-of-doors, there was silence. Brat, uncertain of the quality of that silence, turned to the shelves and began to consider the books.

"Well," said Simon, lounging in the window, "another hazard safely negotiated."

Brat waited, trying to analyse the sound of the words while they still hung in the air.

"Hazard?" he said at length.

"The snags and bunkers in the difficult business of coming back. It must have taken some nerve, all things considered. What moved you to it, Brat-homesickness?"

This was the first frank question he had been asked, and he suddenly liked Ashby the better for it.

"Not exactly. A realisation that my place was here, after all." He felt that that had a self-righteous sound, and added: "I mean, that my place in the world was here."

This was succeeded by another silence. Brat went on looking at books and hoped that he was not going to like young Ashby. That would be an unforeseen complication. It was bad enough not to be able to face the person he was supplanting, now that he was left alone in a room with him; but to find himself liking that person would make the situation intolerable.

It was Bee who broke the silence.

"I think we should have offered the poor little man a drink," she said, coming in. "However, it's too late now. He can get one from his 'contact' at the White Hart."

"The Bell, I suspect," Simon said.

"Why the Bell?"

"Our Lana frequents that in preference to the White Hart."

"Ah, well. The sooner everyone knows the sooner the fuss will be over." She smiled at Brat to take any sting from the words. "Let's go and look at the horses, shall we? Have you any riding clothes with you, Brat?"

"Not any that Latchetts would recognise as riding clothes," Brat said, noticing how thankfully she seized on the excuse not to call him Patrick

"Come up with me," Simon said, "and I'll find you something."

"Good," said Bee, looking pleased with him. "I'll collect Eleanor."

"Did you like being given the old night nursery?" Simon asked, preceding Brat upstairs.

"Very much."

"Same old paper, I suppose you noticed."

"Yes."

"Do you remember the night we had an Ivanhoe-Hereward battle?"

"No; I don't remember that."

"No. Of course you wouldn't."

Again the words hung on the silence, teasing Brat's ear with an echo of their tone.

He followed young Ashby into the room he had shared with his brother, and noticed that there was no suggestion in the room that it had ever been shared by another person. It was, on the contrary, very much Simon's own room; being furnished with his possessions to an extent that made it as much a sitting-room as a bedroom. Shelves of books, rows of silver cups, framed sketches of horses on the walls, easy chairs, and a small desk with a telephone extension on it.

Brat moved over to the window while Simon rummaged among his clothes for appropriate garments. The window, as he knew, looked over the stables, but a green hedge of lilac and laburnum trees hid the buildings from view. Above them, in the middle distance, rose the tower of Clare church. On Sunday, he supposed, he would be taken to service there. Another hazard. Hazard had been an odd word for young Ashby to choose, surely?

Simon emerged from the cupboard with breeches and a tweed coat.

"I think these ought to do," he said, throwing them on the bed. "I'll find you a shirt." He opened a drawer of the chest which held his dressing mirror and toilet things. The chest stood by the window, and Brat, still uneasy in Ashby's vicinity, moved over to the fire-place and began to look at the silver cups on the mantelpiece. All of them were prizes for horsemanship, and they ranged from a hurdle race at the local point-to-point to Olympia. All of them except one were of a date too late to have concerned Patrick Ashby; the exception being a small and humble chalice that had been awarded to Simon Ashby on "Patience" for being the winner of the juvenile jumping class at the Bures Agricultural Show in the year before Patrick Ashby committed suicide.

Simon, looking round and seeing the small cup in Brat's hand, smiled and said: "I took that from you, if you remember."

"From me?" Brat said, unprepared.

"You would have won on Old Harry if I hadn't done you out of it by doing a perfect second round."

"Oh, yes," Brat said. And to lay a new scent: "You seem to have done well for yourself since."

"Not badly," Simon said, his attention going back to his shirt drawer. "But I'm going to do a lot better. Ballsbridge and all stops to Olympia." It was said absentmindedly, but with confidence; as if the money to buy good horseflesh would automatically be available. Brat wondered a little, but felt that this was no moment for discussing the financial future.

"Do you remember the object that used to hang at the end of your bed?" Simon asked casually, pushing the shirt drawer shut.

"The little horse?" Brat said. "Yes, of course. Travesty," he added, giving its name and mock breeding. "By Irish Peasant out of Bog Oak."

He turned from the exhibits on the mantelpiece, meaning to collect the clothes that Ashby had looked out for him; but as he turned he saw Ashby's face in the mirror, and the naked shock on that face stopped him in his tracks. Simon had been in the act of pushing the drawer shut, but the action was arrested half-way. It was, thought Brat, exactly the reaction of someone who has heard a telephone ring; the involuntary pause and then the resumed movement.

Simon turned to face him, slowly, the shirt hanging over his left forearm. "I think you'll find that all right," he said, taking the shirt in his right hand and holding it out to Brat but keeping his eyes on Brat's face. His expression was no longer shocked; he merely looked blank, as if his mind were elsewhere. As if, Brat thought, he were doing sums in his head.

Brat took the shirt, collected the rest of the clothes, expressed his thanks, and made for the door.

"Come down when you're ready," Simon said, still staring at him in that blank way. "We'll be waiting for you."

And Brat, making his way round the landing to his own room in the opposite wing, was shocked in his turn. Ashby hadn't expected him to know that. Ashby had been so certain, indeed, that he would not know about the toy horse that he had been rocked back on his heels when it was clear that he did know about it.

And that meant?

It could mean only one thing.

It meant that young Ashby had not believed for a moment that he was Patrick.

Brat shut the door of the peaceful old night nursery behind him and stood leaning against it, the clothes cascading slowly to the ground from his slackened arm.

Simon had not been fooled. That touching little scene over the sherry glasses had been only an act.

It was a staggering thought.

Why had Simon bothered to pretend?

Why had he not said at once, "You are not Patrick and nothing will make me believe that you are!"?

That had been his original line, if Lana's report and the family atmosphere meant anything. Up to the last moment they had been unsure of his reaction to Brat's arrival; and he had gratified them all by a frank and charming capitulation.

Why the gratuitous capitulation?

Was it-was it a trap of some sort? Were the welcome and the charm merely the grass and green leaves laid over a pit he had prepared?

But he could not have known until the actual face-to-face meeting that he, Brat, was not Patrick. And he had apparently known instantly that the person he was facing was not his brother. Why then should he....

Brat stooped to pick up the clothes from the floor and straightened himself abruptly. He had remembered something. He had remembered that odd relaxing on Simon's part the moment he had had a good look at himself. That suggestion of relief. Of being "let off."

So that was it!

Simon had been afraid that it was Patrick.

When he found that he was faced with a mere impostor he must have had difficulty in refraining from embracing him.

But that still did not explain the capitulation.

Perhaps it was a mere postponement; a setting to partners. It might be that he planned a more dramatic *denouement*; a more public discrediting.

If that were so, Brat thought, there were a few surprises in store for young Mr. Ashby. The more he thought about the surprises the better he began to feel about things. As he changed into riding clothes he recalled with something like pleasure that shocked face in the mirror. Simon had been unaware that he, Brat, had passed any «family» tests. He had not been present when Brat passed the searching test of knowing his way about the house; and he had not had any chance of being told about it. All that he knew was that Brat had satisfied the lawyers of his identity. Having been faced with, to him, an obvious impostor he must have looked forward with a delighted malice to baiting the pretender.

Yes; all ready to pull the wings off flies was young Mr. Ashby.

The first tentative pull had been about the Ivanhoe-Hereward battle. Something that only Patrick would know about. But something, too, that he might easily have forgotten.

The little wooden horse was something that only Patrick would know about and something that Patrick could in no circumstances have forgotten.

And Brat had known about it.

Not much wonder that Ashby had been shocked. Shocked and at sea. Not much wonder that he looked as if he were doing sums in his head.

Brat spared a kind thought for that master tutor, Alec Loding. Loding had missed his vocation; as a coach he was superb. Sometime, somewhere, something was going to turn up that Alec Loding had either forgotten to tell him about or had not himself known; and the moment was going to be a very sticky one; but so far he had known his lines. So far he was word perfect.

Even to the point of Travesty.

A little object of black bog oak, it had been. "Rudimentary and surrealist," Loding had said, "but recognisable as a horse." It had originally been yoked to a jaunting car, the whole turn-out being one of those bog-oak souvenirs that tourists brought back from Ireland in the days before it was more advisable to bring home the bacon. The small car, being made of bits and pieces, soon went the way of all nursery objects; but the little horse, chunky and solid, had survived and had become Patrick's halidom and fetish. It was Alec Loding who had been responsible for its naming; one winter evening over nursery tea. He and Nancy had looked in at Latchetts on their way home from some pony races, hoping for a drink; but finding no one at home except Nora, who was having tea upstairs with her children, they had joined the nursery party. And there, while they made toast, they had sought a name for Patrick's talisman. Patrick, who always referred to the object as "my little Irish horse," and was conscious of no need for a more particular description, rejected all suggestions.

"What would you call it, Alec?" his mother asked Loding, who had been too busy consuming buttered toast to care what a toy was called.

"Travesty," Alec had said, eyeing the thing. "By Irish Peasant out of Bog Oak."

The grown-ups had laughed, but Patrick, who was too young to know the meaning of the word, thought that Travesty was a fine, proud-sounding name. A name filled with the tramplings and prancings and curvettings of war horses, and worthy therefore of the little black object of his love.

"He kept it in a pocket," Loding had said in Queen Adelaide's sitting-room (it was raining that morning) "but when he grew too big for that it hung on a frayed Stewart tartan ribbon off a box of Edinburgh rock at the end of his bed."

Yes: not much wonder that Simon had been shaken to the core. No stranger to the Ashby family could have known about Travesty.

Brat, buttoning himself into Ashby garments and noticing how a well-cut article adapts itself even to an alien figure, wondered what Simon was making of the problem. He had no doubt learned by now that the «impostor» not only knew about the existence of Travesty but had walked about the house with the confidence of long acquaintance. A faint flare of excitement woke in Brat. The same excitement that had made those interviews with old Mr. Sandal so enjoyable. For the last couple of hours-ever since his arrival at Guessgate station-he had been received with kindness and welcome, and the result had been a faint queasiness, a sort of spiritual indigestion. What had been a dice game for dangerous stakes had become a mere taking candy from a baby. Now that Simon was his opponent, the thing was once more a contest.

Not dice, thought Brat, considering himself in the mirror. Chequers rather. A matter of cautious moves, of anticipating attack, of blocking an unforeseen thrust. Yes; chequers.

Brat went downstairs buoyed up with a new anticipation. He would not any more have to stand with his back to young Ashby because he was unable to face him. The pieces were laid out on the board and they faced each other across it.

Through the wide-open door of the hall he could see the Ashbys grouped in the sunlight on the steps and went forward to join them. Ruth, with her chronically roving eye, was the first to see him.

"Oh, doesn't he look nice," said Ruth, still paying court.

Brat was aware that he looked «nice» but wished that Ruth had not called attention to his borrowed finery. He wondered if anyone had ever smacked Ruth Ashby.

"You must get some riding clothes from Walters as soon as may be," Bee said. "These are almost a good enough fit to do as a pattern. Which would save you having to go to town for measurements only."

"Those breeches aren't Walters'," Simon said, eyeing the clothes lazily. "They're Gore and Bowen's. Walters never made a good pair of breeches in his life."

He was draped against the wall by the doorway, relaxed and apparently at peace with the world. His eyes travelled slowly up from Brat's boots to his shirt, and came to rest, with the same detached interest on his face.

"Well," he said amiably, pushing himself off the wall, "let's go and look at some horses."

Not chequers, thought Brat. No, not chequers. Poker.

"We'll show you the stables this afternoon." Bee said, "and leave the mares until after tea."

She ran an arm through Brat's and gathered Simon in with her other one, so that they went towards the stables arm-in-arm like old friends; Eleanor and the twins tailing along behind.

"Gregg is all agog to see you," she said. "Not that you'll notice any agogness, of course. His face doesn't permit anything like that. You'll just have to believe me that he is excited inside."

"What happened to old Malpas?" Brat asked, although he had heard all about old Malpas one afternoon outside the Orangery.

"He became very astigmatic," Bee said. "Figuratively speaking. We could never see eye to eye. He didn't really like taking orders from a woman. So he retired about eighteen months after I took over, and we've had Gregg ever since. He's a misanthropist, and a misogynist, and he has his perks, of course; but he doesn't let any of them interfere with the running of the stables. There was a noted drop in the fodder bills after old Malpas left. And the local people like Gregg better because he buys his hay direct from the farmers and not through a contractor. And I think on the whole he's a better horsemaster than Malpas was. Cleverer at getting a poor horse into condition. And a genius at doctoring a sick one."

Why doesn't he relax? she was thinking, feeling the boy's arm rigid under her fingers. The ordeal is over now, surely. Why doesn't he relax?

And Brat for his part was conscious of her fingers clasping his forearm as he had never been conscious before of a woman's hand. He was experiencing again that surge of an unrecognised emotion that had filled him when Bee had taken his hand to lead him to the interview with Mr. Macallan.

But his first sight of the stables distracted his attention from both emotional and ethical problems.

His reaction to the stable yard at Latchetts was very much the reaction of a merchant seaman to his first acquaintance with one of His Majesty's ships. A sort of contemptuous but kindly amusement. A wonder that the thing wasn't finished off with ribbons. Only the fact that several horses' heads protruded inquisitively from the loose boxes convinced him that the place was seriously used as a stable at all. It was like nothing so much as one of the toy models he had seen in expensive toy shops. He had always imagined that those gay little affairs with their bright paint and their flowers in tubs had been manufactured to a child's taste. But apparently they had been authentic copies of an actual article. He was looking at one of the articles at this moment, and being very much surprised.

Not even the dude ranch had prepared him for this. There was paint galore at the dude ranch, but there was also a tradition of toughness. The dude ranch would never have thought of mowing the bit of grass in the middle until it looked like a square of green baize, so neat-edged and trim that it looked as if you could roll it up and take it away. At the dude ranch there was still a suggestion of the mud, dung, sweat, and flies which are inseparable from a life alongside horseflesh.

The little building on the left of the yard entrance was the saddle room, and in the saddle-room door was the stud-groom, Gregg. Gregg had in the highest degree that disillusioned air common to those who make their living out of horses. He had also the horseman's quality of agelessness. He was probably fifty, but it would not be surprising to be told that he was thirty-five.

He took two paces forward and waited for them to come up to him. The two paces were his concession to good manners, and the waiting emphasised the fact that he was receiving them on his own ground. His clear blue eyes ran over Brat as Bee introduced them, but his expression remained polite and inscrutable. He gave Brat a conventional welcome and a crushing hand-clasp.

"I hear you've been riding horses in America," he said.

"Only western ones," Brat said. "Working horses."

"Oh, these work," Gregg said, inclining his head towards the boxes. Don't be in any doubt about it, the tone said. It was as if he had understood Brat's distrust of the spit and polish. His eyes went past Brat to Eleanor standing behind and he said: "Have you seen what's in the saddle room, Miss Eleanor?"

From the gloom of the saddle room there materialised as if in answer to his question the figure of a small boy. He materialised rather reluctantly as if uncertain of his welcome. In spite of a change of costume Brat recognised him as the rider of the stone lion at the gates of Clare. His present apparel, though less startling, was hardly more orthodox than his leopard-skin outfit. He was wearing a striped football jersey that clung to his tadpole body, a pair of jodhpurs so large that they hung in a fold above each skinny knee, a steeple-chasing jockey cap with the crash-lining showing at the back, and a pair of grubby red moccasins.

"Tony!" said Eleanor. "Tony, what are you doing here?"

"I've come for my ride," said Tony, his eyes darting to and fro among the group like lizards.

"But this isn't the day for your ride."

"Isn't it, Eleanor? I thought it was."

"You know quite well that you don't ride on a Tuesday."

"I thought this was Wednesday."

"You're a dreadful little liar, Tony," Eleanor said dispassionately. "You knew quite well this wasn't Wednesday. You just saw me in a car with a stranger and so you came along to find out who the stranger was."

"Eleanor," murmured Bee, deprecating.

"You don't know him," Eleanor said, as if the subject of discussion was not present. "His curiosity amounts to a mania. It's almost his only human attribute."

"If you take him to-day you won't have to take him to-morrow," Simon said, eyeing the Toselli child with distaste.

"He can't come and expect to ride just when he feels like it!" Eleanor said. "Besides, I said I wouldn't take him out again in these things. I told you to get a pair of boots, Tony."

The black eyes stopped being lizards and became two brimming pools of grief. "My father can't afford boots for me," said Tony with a catch in his alto, guaranteed to draw blood from a stone.

"Your father has £12,000 a year free of income tax," Eleanor said briskly.

"If you took him to-day, Nell," Bee said, "you'd be free to help me to-morrow when half the countryside comes dropping in to have a look at Brat." And, as Eleanor hesitated: "You might as well get it over now that he's here."

"And he'll still be wearing moccasins to-morrow," Simon drawled.

"Indian riders wear moccasins," Tony observed mildly, "and they are very good riders."

"I don't think your destitute father would be very pleased if you turned up with moccasins in the Row. You get a pair of boots. And if I take you this afternoon, Tony, you are not to think that you can make a habit of this."

"Oh, no, Eleanor."

"If you come on the wrong day again you'll just have to go away without a ride."

"Yes, Eleanor." The eyes were lizards again, darting and sliding.

"All right. Go and ask Arthur to saddle Spuds for you."

"Yes, Eleanor."

"No thanks, you'll observe," Eleanor said, watching him go.

"What is the crash helmet for?" Simon asked.

"His skull is as thin as cellophane, he says, and must be protected. I don't know how he got one that size. Out of a circus, I should imagine. What with his Indian longings I suppose I should be thankful that he doesn't turn up in a headband and a single feather."

"He will one day, when it occurs to him," Simon said.

"Oh, well, I suppose I'd better go and saddle Buster. I'm sorry, Brat," she said, smiling a little at him, "but it is really one of those blessings in disguise. The pony he rides will be a lot less fresh with him to-day than he would be to-morrow, after a day in the stable. And you don't really need three people to show you round. I'll go round the paddocks with you after tea."

Brat's tendency to be patronising about spit and polish died painlessly and permanently somewhere between the fourth and fifth boxes. The pampered darlings that he had been prepared to find in these boxes did not exist. Thoroughbred, half-bred, cob, or pony, the shine on their coats came from condition and grooming and not from coddling in warm stables; Brat had lived long enough with horses to recognise that. The only ribbons that had ever been tied on these animals were rosettes of red or blue or yellow; and the rosettes were quite properly in the saddle room.

Bee did the honours, with Gregg as assistant; but since it is not possible for four horsemen to consider any given horse without entering into a discussion, the occasion soon lost the slight formality of its beginnings and degenerated into a friendly free-for-all. And presently Brat, always a little detached from his surroundings, noticed that Bee was leaving the discussion more and more to Simon. That it was Simon instead of Bee who said: "This is a throwout from a racing stable that Eleanor is schooling into a hack," or, "Do you remember old Thora? This is a son of hers by Cold Steel." That Bee was quite deliberately edging herself out.

The twins had soon grown tired and evaporated; Ruth because horses bored her, and Jane because she knew all that was to be known about the horses and did not like the thought that they belonged to a person she did not know. And Gregg, congenitally taciturn, fell more and more into the background with Bee. So that in no time at all it was Simon's occasion; Simon's and Brat's.

Simon behaved as if he had not a care in the world. As if this were just another afternoon and Brat just another visitor. A rather privileged and knowledgeable visitor; unquestionably welcome. Brat, coming to the surface every now and then from his beguilement with the horses, would listen to the light drawl discussing pedigree, conformation, character, or prospects; would watch the cool untroubled profile, and wonder. "A bit light in front," the cool voice would be saying, and the untroubled eyes would be running over the animal as if no more important matter clouded the sun. "Nice, though, don't you think?" or "This one should really be turned out: he's been hunted all the winter; but I'm going pot-hunting on him this summer. And anyhow Bee's awfully stingy with her pasture."

And Bee would put in her tuppenceworth and fade out again.

It was Bee who «ran» Latchetts, but the various interests involved were divided between the three Ashbys. Eleanor's chief concerns were the hacks and hunters, Simon's were hunters and show jumpers, and Bee's were the mares and the Shetland ponies. During Bill Ashby's lifetime, when Latchetts was purely a breeding establishment, the hacks and hunters in the stables had been there for family use and amusement. Occasionally, when there happened to be an extra-good horse in the stable, Bee, who was a better horsewoman than her brother, would come down from London for a week or two to school it and afterwards show it for him. It was good advertisement for Latchetts; not because Latchetts ever dealt in made horses but because the simple repetition of a name is of value in the commercial world, as the writers of advertisements have discovered. Nowadays the younger Ashbys, under Bee's supervision, had turned the stables into a profitable rival to the brood mares.

"Mr. Gates is asking if he can speak to you, sir," said the stable-man to Gregg. And Gregg excused himself and went back to the saddle room.

Fourposter came to the door of his box, stared coldly at Brat for a moment, and then nudged him jocosely with his Roman nose.

"Has he always been Jane's?" Brat asked.

"No," Bee said, "he was bought for Simon's fourteenth birthday. But Simon grew so fast that in a year or so he had outgrown him, and Jane at four was already clamouring to ride a 'real' horse instead of a Shetland. So she fell heir to him. If he ever had any manners he has forgotten them, but he and Jane seem to understand each other."

Gregg came back to say that it was Miss Ashby that Gates wanted to see. It was about the fencing.

"All right, I'll come," Bee said. And as Gregg went away: "What he really wants to see is Brat, but he'll just wait till to-morrow like the rest of the countryside. It's so like Gates to try to steal a march. Opportunism is his middle name. If you two go trying out any of the horses, do be back for tea. I want to go round the paddocks with Brat before it gets dark."

"Do you remember Gates?" Simon asked, opening the door of another box.

"No, I don't think so."

"He's the tenant of Wigsell."

"What became of Vidler, then?"

"He died. This man was married to his daughter and had a small farm the other side of Bures."

Well, Simon had dealt him the cards he needed that time. He looked at Simon to see how he had taken it, but Simon's whole interest seemed to be in the horse he was leading out of the box.

"These last three boxes are all new acquisitions, bought with an eye on the show ring. But this is the pick of the bunch. He's a four-year-old by High Wood out of a mare called Shout Aloud. His name is Timber."

Timber was a black without a brown hair in him. He had a rudimentary white star, and a ring of white on each coronet; and he was quite the handsomest thing in horseflesh that Brat had ever been at close quarters with. He came out of his box with an air of benevolent condescension, as if aware of his good looks and pleased that they should be the subject of tribute. There was something oddly demure about him, Brat thought, watching him. Perhaps it was just the way he was standing, with his forefeet close together. Whatever it was it didn't go with the self-confident, considering eye.

"Difficult to fault, isn't he?" Simon said.

Brat, lost in admiration of his physical conformation, was still puzzled by what he thought of as the butter-wouldn't-melt air.

"He has one of the best-looking heads I've ever seen on a horse," Simon said. "And just look at the bone." He led the horse round. "And a sweet mover, too," he said.

Brat went on looking in silence, admiring and puzzled.

"Well?" Simon said, waiting for Brat's comment.

"Isn't he conceited!" said Brat.

Simon laughed.

"Yes, I suppose he is. But not without cause."

"No. He's a good-looker all right."

"He is more than that. He's a lovely ride. And he can jump anything you can see the sky over."

Brat moved forward to the horse and made friendly overtures. Timber accepted the gesture without responding. He looked gratified but faintly bored.

"He should have been a tenor," Brat said.

"A tenor?" Simon said. "Oh, I see. The conceit." He considered the horse afresh. "I suppose he is rather pleased with himself. I hadn't thought about it before. Would you like to try him out, by the way?"

"I certainly would."

"He ought to have some exercise to-day and he hasn't had it so far." He hailed a stable-man. "Arthur, bring a saddle for Timber."

"Yes, sir. A double bridle, sir?"

"No; a snaffle." And, as the man went, to Brat: "He has a mouth like a glove."

Brat wondered if he was merely reluctant to submit that tender mouth to the ham hands of a Westerner with a curb rein at his disposal.

While Timber was being saddled they inspected the two remaining "acquisitions." They were a long-backed bay mare with a good head and quarters ("Two good ends make up for a middle," as Simon said) who was called Scapa; and Chevron, a bright chestnut of great quality with a nervous eye.

"What are you riding?" Brat asked, as Simon led Chevron back to his box.

Simon bolted the half-door and turned to face him.

"I thought you might like to have a look round by yourself," he said. And as Brat, surprised by this piece of luck, was momentarily wordless: "Don't let him get lit-up too much, will you, or he'll break out again when he has been dried."

"No, I'll bring him back cool," Brat said; and flung his leg across his first English horse.

He took one of the two whips that Arthur was holding out for his choosing, and turned the horse to the inner end of the yard.

"Where are you going?" Simon asked, as if surprised.

"Up to the down, I think," Brat said, as if Simon's question had applied to his choice of a place to ride in.

If that gate at the north-west corner of the yard didn't still lead to the short-cut to the downs, then Simon would have to tell him. If it still did lead there, Simon would have one more item to worry about.

"You haven't chosen a very good whip for shutting gates with," Simon said smoothly. "Or are you going to jump everything you come to?" You rodeo artist, the tone said.

"I'll shut the gates," Brat said equably.

He began to walk Timber to the corner of the yard.

"He has his tricks, so look out for him," Simon said, as an afterthought.

"I'll look out for him," Brat said, and rode away to the inner gate which Arthur was waiting to open for him.

Arthur grinned at him in a friendly fashion and said admiringly: "He's a fly one, that, sir."

As he turned to his right into the little lane he considered the implication of that very English adjective. It was a long time since he had heard anything called fly. «Fly» was "cute"-in the English sense, not in the American. Fly was something on the side. A fly cup. Something sly with a hint of cleverness in it.

A fly one, Timber was.

The fly one walked composedly up the track between the green banks netted with violets, his ears erect in anticipation of the turf ahead of them. As they came in sight of the gate at the far end he danced a little. "No," said Brat's hands, and he desisted at once. Someone had left the gate open, but since there was a notice saying PLEASE SHUT THE GAT neatly painted in the middle of it, Brat manoeuvred Timber into the appropriate position for closing it. Timber seemed as well acquainted with gates and their uses as a cow pony was with a rope, but never before had Brat had so delicate and so well-oiled a mechanism under him. Timber obeyed the slightest indication of hand or heel with a lack of questioning and a confidence that was new in Brat's experience. Surprised and delighted, Brat experimented with this new adaptability. And Timber, even with the turf in front of him, with the turf practically under his feet, moved sweetly and obediently under his hands.

"You wonder!" said Brat softly.

The ears flicked at him.

"You perishing marvel," he said, and closed his knees as he turned to face the down. Timber broke into a slow canter, headed for the clumps of gorse and juniper bushes that marked the skyline.

So this was what riding a good English horse was like, he thought. This communion, this being one half of a whole. This effortlessness. This magic.

The close, fine turf slipped by under them, and it was odd to see no little spurt of dust coming up as the shoes struck. England, England, said the shoes as they struck. A soft drum on the English turf.

I don't care, he thought, I don't care. I'm a criminal, and a heel, but I've got what I wanted, and it's worth it. By God, it's worth it. If I died to-morrow, it's worth it.

They came to the level top of the down and faced the double row of bushes that made a rough natural avenue, about fifty yards wide, along the crest. This was something that Alec Loding had forgotten to tell him about, and something that had not appeared on a map. Even the Ordnance Survey can hardly take note of juniper growths. He pulled up to consider it. But Timber was in no considering mood. Timber knew all about that level stretch of down between the rows of bushes.

"All right," said Brat, "let's see what you can do," and let him go.

Brat had ridden flyers before. Dozens of them. He had ridden sprinters and won money with them. He had been bolted with at the speed of jet propulsion. Mere speed no longer surprised him. What surprised him was the smoothness of the progress. It was like being carried through the air on a horse suspended to a merry-go-round.

The soft air parted round his face and tickled his ears and fled away behind them, smelling of grass with the sun on it and leather and gorse. Who cares, who cares, who cares! said the galloping feet. Who cares, who cares! said the blood in Brat's veins.

If he died to-morrow it was all the same to him.

As they came to the end of the stretch Timber began to pull up of his own accord, but it was against Brat's instincts to let a horse make the decisions, so he kept him going, turned him round the south end of the green corridor, and cantered him gently to a walk, and Timber responded without question.

"Brother," said Brat, running his fingers up the dark crest, "are there more like you in England, or do you rate special?"

Timber bent his head to the caress, still with the air of one receiving his due.

But as they walked back on the south side of the irregular green hedge Brat's attention and interest went to the countryside spread below them. Except that he was looking at it upside down, as it were-from the north, instead of from the south as one looks normally at a map-this was Clare as he had first become acquainted with it. All laid out below his eye in Ordnance Survey clarity and precision.

Down below him, a little to his left, were the crimson roofs of Latchetts, set in the neat squares of paddock. Farther to the left was the church, on its own small rise; and left of it again, the village of Clare, a huddle of roofs in pale green trees. Where the land sloped up from the village to make the south side of the small valley stood Clare Park, a long white house sheltered from the south-west Channel gales by the slope behind it.

Directly opposite him that slope rose into a smaller and tamer version of the down he was sitting on; a low green hill called Tanbitches. It was an open stretch of grazing, marked half-way up with the green scar of an old quarry, and crowned by the beeches that had given it its name. There were only seven beeches now instead of ten, but the clump made a decorative and satisfying climax to the southern side of the valley.

The other side of the Tanbitches hill, as he knew from the maps, ran away in a gentle slope for a mile and a half to the cliffs. To the cliffs where Patrick Ashby had put an end to his life. Behind the lower rise of the valley, on the reverse slope of Clare Park, were farms that merged imperceptibly in a mile or two into the suburbs of Westover. In the slight hollow that marked the Clare Park slope from Tanbitches hill was a path that led to the coast. The path that Patrick Ashby had taken on that day eight years ago.

It was suddenly more real to him than it had ever been so far: this tragedy which he was using to his advantage. More real even than it had been in the rooms that Patrick had lived in. In the house there had been other associations besides Patrick: associations more present and alive. There had been the distractions of human intercourse and of his own need to be constantly wary. Out here in the open and alone it had a reality that it had never had before. Up that straggling path on the other side of the valley a boy had gone, so loaded with misery that this neat green English world had meant nothing to him. He had had horses like Timber, and friends and family, and a belonging-place, and it had all meant nothing to him.

For the first time in his detached existence Brat was personally aware of another's tragedy. When Loding had first told him the story, in that London pub, he had had nothing but contempt for the boy who had had so much and could not do without that little extra. A poor thing, he had thought. Then Loding had brought those photographs to Kew, and had shown him Patrick, and he had had that odd feeling of identification, of partisanship.

"That is Pat Ashby. He was about eleven there," Loding had said, his feet propped comfortably on the railings of the park, and had passed him the piece of paper. It was a snapshot taken with a Brownie 2A, and Brat had accepted it with a curiosity that was active but not urgent.

But Pat Ashby had not been the anonymous "poor thing" that he had so far held in his mind. He had been a real person. A likeable real person. A person who would have been, Brat felt, very much his cup of tea. From being vaguely anti-Patrick he had become Patrick's champion.

It was not, however, until this moment of quiet above Latchetts that he had been moved to sorrow for him.

Clink-clink! came the faint sound from the valley; and Brat's eyes travelled down from Tanbitches to the cottage at its foot. The blacksmith's, that was. A quarter of a mile west of the village. A tiny black square by the roadside it had been on the map; now it was a small building with a black chimney and an occupant who made musical sounds with a hammer.

The whole scene was very like the picture from which he had acquired his first-year French. *Voila le forgeron*. It needed only a cure coming from the church. And a postman on a bicycle between the forge and the village.

Brat slid from Timber's back, from long habit loosened the girths as if he saddled up hours ago, and sat down with his back to the gorse and juniper to feast his eyes on this primer of the English countryside.

The great clouds sailed up and past, the sunlight flickered and ran, the uncertain soft wind edged in and out of the junipers and made soft scufflings in the grass. Timber made small sounds with his bit, and cropped turf in a tentative and superior fashion. Brat sank into a daze of pleasure and ceased altogether from conscious thought.

He was roused by the swift fling-up of Timber's head, and almost at the same moment a female voice behind him said, as if it were a chant and rhymed:

"Don't look,

Don't move,

Shut your eyes

And guess who."

It was a slightly Cockney voice, and it dripped with archness.

Like anyone else in the circumstances Brat disobeyed the injunction automatically. He looked round into the face of a girl of sixteen or so. She was a large, plumpish girl, with bright auburn hair and prominent blue eyes. The eyes were remarkable in that they managed to be at once avid and sleepy. As they met Brat's they almost popped out altogether.

"Oh!" said the girl, in a half-shriek. "I thought you were Simon. You're not!"

"No," agreed Brat, beginning to get to his feet.

But before he could move she had dropped to the grass beside him.

"My, you gave me a shock. I bet I know who you are. You're the long-lost brother, aren't you? You must be; you're so like Simon. That's who you are, isn't it?"

Brat said that it was.

"You even wear the same kind of clothes."

Brat said that they were Simon's clothes. "You know Simon?"

"Of course I know Simon. I'm Sheila Parslow. I'm a boarder at Clare Park."

"Oh." The school for dodgers, Eleanor had called it. The place where no one had to learn the nine-times.

"I'm doing my best to have an affaire with Simon, but it's uphill work."

Brat did not know the correct rejoinder to this, but she did not need conversational encouragement.

"I have to do something to put some pep into life at Clare Park. You can't imagine the screaming boredom of it. You simply can't imagine. There is nothing, but I mean *nothing*, that you are forbidden to do. I once got so desperate I took off all my clothes and walked into Cedric's office-Cedric is our Leader, he doesn't like being called the Head, but that's what he is, of course-I walked in with nothing on, not a stitch, and all he said was: 'Have you ever thought of going on a diet, Sheila dear? Just took a look at me and said: 'Have you ever thought of going on a diet? and then went on with looking up *Who's Who*. He's always looking up *Who's Who*. You don't really stand much of a chance of fetching up at Clare Park unless your father is in *Who's Who*. Or your mother, of course. My father's not in it, but he has millions, my father, and that makes a very good substitute. Millions are a very good introduction, aren't they?"

Brat said that he supposed they were.

"I flapped Father's millions in front of Simon; Simon has a great respect for a good investment and I hoped it would weight my charms, so to speak; but he's a frightful snob, Simon, isn't he?"

"Is he?"

"Don't you know?"

"I've only met him to-day."

"Oh, of course. You've just come back. How exciting for you. I can understand Simon not being overjoyed, of course, but it must be exciting for you to put his nose out of joint."

Brat wondered if she, too, pulled the wings off flies.

"I may have more chance with Simon now that you've taken his fortune from him. I'll have to waylay him somewhere and see. I thought I was waylaying him now, when I saw Timber. He often comes up here because it's his favourite place for exercising the horses. He hates Tanbitches." She jerked her chin at the opposite side of the valley. "And this is a good place for getting him alone. So I came up here on spec, and then I saw that black brute, and I thought I had him cold. But it was only you."

"I'm sorry," Brat said meekly.

She considered him.

"I suppose it's no good my trying to seduce you instead?" she said.

"I'm afraid not."

"Is it that I'm not your type, or is it not your line?"

"Not much in my line, I'm afraid."

"No, I suppose not," she said, agreeing with him. "You have a face like a monk. Funny you should look so like Simon and yet look so different. Simon's no monk; as that Gates girl over at Wigsell could tell you. I make images of that Gates girl and stick pins in them, but it doesn't do any good. She goes on blooming like a blasted peony and fascinating him like fly-paper."

She was rather like a well-blown peony herself, he thought, looking at her wet red mouth and the buttons straining the cloth across her ample bust. A rather drooping and disappointed peony at the moment.

"Does Simon know that you are fond of him?" Brat asked.

"Fond of him? I'm not fond of him. I don't think I like him at all. I just want to have an *affaire* with him to brighten up the term a bit. Until I can leave this boring place."

"If you can do anything you like, why can't you leave now?" Brat asked reasonably.

"Well, I don't want to look too much of a fool, you know. I went to school at Ling Abbey, you see, and I made the place a hell so that my people would take me away and send me here. I thought I was going to have the time of my life here, with no lessons and no timetable and no rules or anything. I had no idea it would be so boring. I could weep with boredom."

"Isn't there anyone at Clare Park you could substitute for Simon? I mean, someone who would be more-accommodating?"

"No, I had a look at them first. Skinny and hairy and intellectual. Have you ever noticed how the intellect runs to hair? Some people get a kick out of disgust, but not me. I like them good-looking. And you have to admit Simon is very good-looking. There was an under-gardener at Ling Abbey that was almost as handsome, but he hadn't that lovely God-damn-you look that Simon has."

"Didn't the under-gardener keep you at the Abbey place?"

"Oh, no, they sacked him. It was easier than expelling me and having a scandal. But they had to expel me in any case, so they might as well have kept poor Albert. He was much better with his lobelias than he was with girls. But of course they couldn't be expected to know that. I suppose you wouldn't put in a good word for me with Simon? It would be such a pity to waste all the agony I've gone through trying to interest him."

"Agony?"

"You don't suppose I endure hours on those horrible quadrupeds just for *fun*, do you? With that cold stick of a sister of his looking down her nose at me. Oh, I forgot: she's your sister too, isn't she? But perhaps you've been away so long that you don't think of her the way a boy thinks of his sister."

"I certainly don't," Brat said; but she was not listening.

"I suppose you've ridden horses since you could crawl, so you have no idea what it is like to be bumped about on a great shapeless mountain of a thing that's far too high from the ground and has nothing to hold on to. It looks so easy when Simon does it. The horse looks so nice and *narrow* when you're standing on the ground. You think you could ride it the way you ride a bicycle. It's only when you get up you find that its back is simply acres across and you can make no impression on it at all. You just sit there and are bumped about, and your legs slip backwards and forwards instead of staying still like Simon's, and you get large blisters and can't sit down in the bath for weeks. You don't look quite so like a monk when you smile a bit."

Brat suggested that surely there were better ways of attracting favourable notice than being a tyro at something that the object of one's pursuit already did to perfection.

"Oh, I didn't think that I'd attract him that way. It just gave me an excuse for being round the stables. That sister of-your sister doesn't stand any hanging round if you haven't got business."

"Your sister," he thought, and liked the sound of it.

He had three sisters now, and at least two of them were the kind he would have indented for. Presently he must go down and make their further acquaintance.

"I'm afraid I must go," he said, getting up and putting the reins over Timber's head.

"I wish you didn't have to," she said, watching him tighten the girth. "You are quite the nicest person I have talked to since I came to Clare. It's a pity you aren't interested in women. You might cut Simon out with the Gates girl, and then I'd have more chance. Do you know the Gates girl?"

"No," Brat said, getting up on Timber.

"Well, have a look at her. She's very pretty."

"I'll do that," Brat said.

"Now that you're home, I'll be running across you in the stables, I suppose."

"I expect so."

"You wouldn't like to give me one of my lessons instead of your sister, would you?"

"I'm afraid that's not my department."

"Oh, well." She sounded resigned. "You look very nice on that brute. I suppose *his* back is acres across too. They all are. It's a conspiracy."

"Good-bye," said Brat.

"Do you know, I don't know your name. Someone told me, of course, but I forget. What is it?"

"Patrick.'

And as he said the word his mind went back to the path across the valley, and he forgot Miss Parslow almost instantly. He cantered back along the top of the down until he came level with Latchetts, and then began to walk Timber down. Below him, a green ride led through the paddocks to the west of the house and so to the sweep of gravel in front of it. It was by that way that Jane had come this morning, when she had become mixed up with his reception at the front door. The gate to the ride stood open, the gate lying flat against the stout paddock rails that bordered the ride. Brat rode down until the steepness of the down gave way to a gentle slope and then pressed Timber into a canter. The green tunnel of the ride with its soft floor was open before them, and he was not going to spoil it by stopping to shut another gate that someone else had left open.

It was due to no good riding on Brat's part that his left leg was still whole five seconds later. It was due entirely to the years of rough-riding that had made his physical reactions quicker than conscious thought. The swerve was so sudden and so wholehearted that the white rail was scraping along the saddle where his leg should have been before he realised that his leg was not there. That he had taken it away before he had had time to think about it.

As Timber came away from the rails he settled back into the saddle and pulled the horse to a stop. Timber stopped obediently.

"Whew!" said Brat, expelling his pent breath. He looked down at Timber standing innocent and demure in the exact centre of the ride.

"You ornery thing, you," he said, amused.

Timber went on looking demure but the ears listened to him. A trifle apprehensively, Brat thought.

"I know men who'd beat the bejasus out of you for that," Brat said, and turned the horse's nose to the down again. Timber retraced his steps obediently, but was obviously not easy in his mind. When he was far enough away from the gate Brat took him into a canter once more and down to the opening. He had neither spurs nor curb but he was curious to see what Timber would do this time. Timber, as he had expected, swept good-manneredly into the ride, bisecting the distance from either rail with mathematical precision.

"What, me!" he seemed to be saying. "Do a thing like that on purpose? Me, with my perfect manners? Of course not. I just lost my balance for a moment, coming into the ride there. It can happen to the best of us."

"Well, well," thought Brat, pulling him to a walk. "Think you're smart, don't you," he said aloud, walking him down the ride. "Far smarter horses than you have tried to brush me off, take it from me. I've been brushed off horses that would make you look like five-cents worth of candy."

The black ears flickered, listening to him, analysing the sound of his voice, its tone; puzzled.

The mares came to the rails to watch them pass, pleased with this small event in their placid lives; and the foals ran round and round in a self-induced excitement. But Timber took no notice of them. He had lost any active interest in mares at a very early age, and just now his whole interest seemed to be in the fact that he had been outwitted, and that the outwitting one made sounds which he did not understand. His ears, which should have been pricked at the thought of his nearing stable, were restless and enquiring.

Brat rode round the front of the house, as Jane had that morning, but he saw no one. He went on to the stables and found Eleanor just riding in with a led horse, having given Tony his lesson and left him at Clare Park.

"Hullo!" she said, "have you been out on Timber?" She sounded a little surprised. "I hope Simon warned you about him."

"Yes, thank you, he warned me."

"One of my bad buys," she said ruefully, eyeing Timber as they rode side by side towards the yard.

"Yours?" he said.

"Yes. Didn't Simon tell you about that?"

"No."

"That was nice of him. I expect he didn't want you to find out too soon what a fool of a sister you have." She smiled a little at him, as if she were glad to be his sister. "I bought him at the Lerridge Hunt sale. It was Timber who killed old Felix. Old Felix Hunstanton, the Master, you know. Did Simon tell you?"

"No. No, he just told me about his tricks."

"Old Felix had some good horses, and when they were being sold I went over to see what I could pick up. None of the Lerridge Hunt regulars was bidding for Timber, but I thought it was because of sentiment, perhaps. I thought they probably didn't want to own the horse the Master was killed on. As if there was ever any sentiment about horse-dealing! I oughtn't to be let out alone. Even so, I ought to have wondered why I was getting him so cheap; with his looks and his breeding and his performance. It was only afterwards that we found that he had done the same thing to the huntsman a few days later, only the branches were small and broke, instead of braining him or sweeping him off."

"I see," said Brat, who was beginning to.

"Not that anyone needed convincing, apparently. No one who was there when Felix was killed believed it was an accident. It was a Lerridge Castle meet, and they had found in one of the Lerridge woods and gone away over the park. Good open galloping country with the trees isolated. And yet Timber took Felix under an oak, going an awful bat, and he was dead before he hit the ground. But of course we heard about all that later. All I knew when I was bidding for him was that Felix had hit his head on a branch during the hunt. Which is something that has been happening to people ever since William Rufus."

"Did anyone actually see it happen?"

"No, I don't think so. Everyone just knew that with the whole park to choose from Felix wouldn't have ridden under the oak. And when he tried the same thing on Samms, the huntsman, there was no doubt. So he is put into the sale with the rest of the lot and all the Lerridge regulars sit around in silence and watch Eleanor Ashby from over Clare way buying a pup."

"He's a very elegant pup, there's no denying," Brat said, rubbing Timber's neck.

"He's beautiful," Eleanor said. "And a faultless jumper. Did you jump him at all to-day? No? You must next time. He is safest jumping because his mind is distracted. He hasn't time to think up mischief. It's odd, isn't it; he doesn't *look* untrustworthy," she added, still eyeing her bad bargain with a puzzled eye.

"No."

She caught the tone and said: "You don't sound too sure."

"Well. I must allow he is the most conceited animal I've ever met."

This seemed to be as new an idea to Eleanor as it had been to Simon.

"Vain, is he? Yes, I suppose he is. I expect *I'd* be conceited if I were a horse and I had been clever enough to kill a man. Did he try any tricks to-day?"

"He swerved at the entrance to the ride, but that was all." He did not say: He took advantage of the first good stout piece of timber to mash my leg against. That was something between the horse and himself. He and Timber had a long acquaintanceship in front of them, and a lot to say to each other.

"He behaves like an angel most of the time," Eleanor said. "That is what is so lethal about him. We have all ridden him; Simon and Gregg and Arthur and me, and he has only twice played up. Once with Simon and once with Arthur. But of course," she added with a grin, "we have always given trees a wide berth."

"He'd be a great success in the desert. Not a rail or a limb in a day's journey."

Eleanor looked sadly at the black horse as Brat drew up to let her precede him into the yard. "He'd think up something else, I expect."

And Brat, thinking it over, agreed with her. Timber was that rare thing in horses: a deliberate and intelligent rogue. Balked of his normal fun, he would think up something new. There was nothing small-time about Timber. Nor was Simon exactly small-time. Simon had sent him out on a notorious rogue, with a light remark about the horse "having its tricks." As neat a piece of vicarious manslaughter as anyone ever thought up.

Beatrice Ashby looked down the dining-table at her nephew Patrick and thought how well he was doing it. The occasion must be an extraordinarily difficult one for him, but he was carrying it off beautifully. He was neither awkward nor exuberant. He brought to the situation the same quiet detachment that he had shown on their first meeting in that Pimlico room. It was a very adult quality, and a little surprising in a boy not yet twenty-one. He had great dignity this Patrick Ashby, she thought, watching him dealing with the Rector. Surely never before can anyone have been so silent by habit without appearing either stiff or stupid.

It was she who had brought Simon up, and she was pleased with the result. But this boy had brought himself up, and the result was even better, it seemed. Perhaps it was a case of "giving the first seven years" and the rest followed automatically. Or perhaps it was that the goodness in Patrick had been so innate that he had needed no other guidance. He had followed his own lights, and the result was this quiet, adult young man with the still face.

It was a mask of a face; a sad mask, on the whole. It was such a contrast to the similar set of features in Simon's mobile countenance that they reminded one of those reversible comedy-tragedy masks that are used to decorate the title-pages of plays.

Simon was being particularly gay to-night, and Bee's heart ached for him. He too was doing it well, and to-night she loved him almost without reservation. Simon was abdicating, and doing it with a grace and spontaneity that she would not have believed possible. She felt a little guilty that she had underrated him. She had not credited the selfish, acquisitive Simon with such a power of renunciation.

They were choosing a name for Honey's filly foal, and the conversation was growing ribald. Nancy was insisting that «honey» was an endearment, and should be translated as "poppet," and Eleanor said that no thoroughbred as good as Honey's present foal should be damned by a name like Poppet. If Eleanor had refused to dress especially for Patrick's arrival, she had now made up for it. It was a long time since Bee had seen her looking so well or so pretty. Eleanor belonged to a type which did not glow easily.

"Brat is in love with Honey," Eleanor said.

"I suppose Bee dragged you round the paddocks before you were well over the doorstep," said Nancy. "Were you impressed, Brat?" She too had adopted the nickname. Only the Rector called him Patrick.

"I'm in love with the whole bunch," Brat said. "And I found an old friend."

"Oh? Who was that?"

"Regina."

"Oh, yes, of course. Poor old Regina. She must be about twenty!" Nancy said.

"Not so much of the 'poor'," said Simon. "Regina has kept us shod and clothed for a whole generation. We ought to pay her a dividend."

"She takes her dividends out in pasture," Eleanor said. "She was always a greedy eater."

"When you drop foals like Regina year after year without a break, you're entitled to an appetite," Simon said.

Simon was drinking a great deal more than usual, but it seemed to be having little effect on him. Bee thought that the Rector looked at him now and then with pity in his eyes.

And Brat, too, at the other end of the table, was watching Simon, but without pity. Pity was not an emotion that Brat indulged in very often: like everyone who despises self-pity he did not readily pity others; but it was not because of his native disinclination to pity that he withheld sympathy from Simon Ashby. It was not even because Simon was his declared enemy; he had admired enemies before now. It was because there was something about Simon Ashby that repelled him. There was something unaccountable about Simon. There he sat, being light-hearted and charming, and there sat his relations and friends silently applauding his nobility and his courage. They were applauding an "act," but they would all be staggered to know what an act Simon was really putting on for their benefit.

Watching him as he displayed his graces, Brat felt that Simon reminded him of someone that he had met quite lately. Someone who had just that air of breeding, and excellent good manners, and good looks, and that-unaccountability. Who could that have been?

He was maddened by that tip-of-the-tongue feeling. In one more second he would remember. Loding? No. Someone on the ship coming over? Not very likely. That lawyer chap: the K.C. chap, Macdermott? No. Then who could it —

"Don't you think so, Patrick?"

It was the Rector again. He must be careful with the old boy. He had been more afraid of meeting George Peck than of anyone but Simon. After a twin brother there is no one who is liable to remember so much about you or to remember that much so well as the man who taught you. There would be a score of small things that George Peck would know about Patrick Ashby that not even Patrick Ashby's mother would know. But the meeting had gone off very well. Nancy Peck had kissed him on both cheeks and said: "Oh, dear, you've got very grown-up and serious, haven't you!"

"Patrick always was," the Rector had said, and had shaken hands.

He had looked consideringly at Brat, but no more consideringly than was normal in a man examining an old pupil met after a decade of absence. And Brat, who had no love for the Cloth, found himself liking the Rector. He was still wary of him, but the wariness was due not to the Rector's calling but to his knowledge of Pat Ashby, and to the intelligence and penetration of the eyes in his simian face.

Considering that intelligence, Brat was glad that he was particularly well primed in the matter of Pat Ashby's schooling. The Rector was Alec Loding's brother-in-law, and Loding had had what he called a front-stall view of the Ashby twins' education.

As for Alec Loding's sister, she was the most beautiful woman that Brat had ever seen. He had never heard of the famous Nancy Ledingham, but her brother had been eloquent about her. "Could have had anyone in the world; any man would have been delighted to keep her just to look at; but she had to choose George Peck." He had been shown Nancy in every kind of garment, from a swimming

suit to her court presentation gown, but none of the photographs had done justice to her serene beauty, her gaiety, her general niceness. He felt that George Peck must be all right if Nancy had married him.

"Was that the Toselli child you had out with you?" she was saying to Eleanor. "That object I met you with this afternoon?"

"That was Tony," Eleanor said.

"How he brought back the days of my youth!"

"Tony did? How?"

"You won't remember it, but there used to be things called cavalry regiments. And every regiment had a trick-riding team. And every trick-riding team had a «comedy» member. And every «comedy» member of a trick-riding team looked just like Tony."

"So they did!" Bee said, delighted. "That was what he reminded me of this afternoon and I couldn't think of it at the time. That masterly irrelevance. The completely unrelated garments."

"You may wonder why I took him out at all," Eleanor remarked. "But after Sheila Parslow he's a positive holiday. He'll ride quite well some day, Tony."

"To the prospective horseman all things are forgiven, are they?" the Rector said, mocking mildly.

"Doesn't La Parslow get any better?" Simon asked.

"She will never get any better. She skates about in the saddle like a block of ice on a plate. I could weep for the horse all the time we are out. Luckily Cherrypicker has an indestructible frame and practically no feelings."

The move from the dining-room to the living-room produced an anti-climax. The talk ceased to flow and ran into aimless trickles. Brat was suddenly so tired that he could hardly stand up. He hoped that no one would spring anything on him now; his normally hard head was muzzy with unaccustomed wine, and his thoughts fumbled and stuck. The twins said good night and went upstairs. Bee poured the coffee which had been placed in readiness for them on a low table by the fire, and it was not as hot as it should have been. Bee made despairing grimaces at Nancy.

"Our Lana, is it?" Nancy asked, sympathetic.

"Yes. I suppose she had to meet our Arthur and couldn't wait another ten minutes."

Simon, too, fell silent, as if the effort he had been making seemed suddenly not worth while. Only Eleanor seemed to have brought from the dining-room the warmth and happiness that had made dinner a success. In the moments of silence between the slow spurts of talk the rain fell against the tall windows with a soft shush.

"You were right about the weather, Aunt Bee," Eleanor said. "She said this morning that it was that too-bright kind that would bring rain before night."

"Bee is perennially right," the Rector said, giving her a look that was half a smile, half a benediction.

"It sounds loathsome," Bee said.

Nancy waited until they had lingered properly over their coffee and then said: "It has been a very full day for Brat, Bee; and I expect you are all tired. We won't stay now, but you'll come over and see us when you can crawl out from under the crush, won't you, Brat?"

Simon fetched her wraps and they all went out to the doorstep to see their guests off. On the doorstep Nancy took off her evening shoes, tucked them under her arm, and stepped into a pair of Wellingtons that she had left behind the door. Then she tucked her other arm under her husband's, huddled close to him under their single umbrella, and walked away with him into the night.

"Good old Nancy," Simon said. "You can't keep a Ledingham down." He sounded just a little drunk.

"Dear Nan," Bee said softly. She moved into the living-room and surveyed it in an absent fashion.

"I think Nan is right," she said. "It is time we all went to bed. It has been an exciting day for all of us."

"We don't want it to end so soon, do we?" Eleanor said.

"You have La Parslow at nine-thirty to-morrow," Simon reminded her. "I saw it in the book."

"What were *you* doing with the riding book?"

"I like to see that you're not cheating on your income tax."

"Oh, yes, let's go to bed," Eleanor said, with a wide happy yawn. "It's been a wonderful day."

She turned to Brat to say good night, became suddenly shy, gave him her hand and said: "Good night then, Brat. Sleep well," and went away upstairs.

Brat turned to Bee, but she said: "I shall come in to see you on my way up." So he turned back to face Simon.

"Good night, Simon." He met the clear cold eyes levelly.

"Good night to you-Patrick," Simon said, looking faintly amused. He had managed to make the name sound like a provocation.

"Are you coming up now?" Brat heard Bee ask him as he climbed the stairs.

"Not quite yet."

"Will you see that the lights are out, then? And make sure of the locks?"

"Yes, of course I'll do that. Good night, Bee darling."

As Brat turned on to the landing he saw Bee's arms go round Simon. And he was stabbed by a hot despairing jealousy that shocked him. What had it to do with him?

Bee followed him into the old night nursery in a few moments. She looked with a practised eye at the bed and said: "That moron promised to put in a hot-water bottle and she has forgotten to do it."

"Don't worry," Brat said. "I'd only have put it out again. I don't use the things."

"You must think us a crowd of soft-livers," she said.

"I think you're a nice crowd," he said.

She looked at him and smiled.

"Tired?"

"Yes."

"Too tired for breakfast at eight-thirty?"

"That sounds luxuriously late to me."

"Did you enjoy it, that hard life-Brat?"

"Sure."

"I think you're nice too," she said, and kissed him lightly. "I wish you hadn't stayed away from us so long, but we are glad to have you back. Good night, my dear." And as she went out: "It's no use ringing a bell, of course, because no one will answer. But if you have a mad desire for fried shrimps, or iced water, or a copy of the *Pilgrim's Progress* or something, come along to my room. It is still the right-hand one in front."

"Good night," he said.

She stood for a moment outside his room, the door-knob still in her hand, and then moved away to Eleanor's door. She knocked and went in. For the last year or so Eleanor had been a great comfort to her. She had been so long alone in her need for judgment and resolution that it was refreshing to have the companionship of her own kind; to have Eleanor's unemotional good sense on tap when she wanted it.

"Hullo, Bee," Eleanor said, looking up through the hair she was brushing. She was beginning to drop the "aunt," as Simon did.

Bee sank into a chair and said: "Well, that's over."

"It turned out to be quite a success, didn't it," Eleanor said. "Simon behaved beautifully. Poor Simon."

"Yes. Poor Simon."

"Perhaps Brat-Patrick-will offer him some kind of partnership. Do you think? After all, Simon helped to make the stable. It wouldn't be fair to walk in and grab the lot after taking no interest for years and years."

"No. I don't know. I hope so."

"You sound tired."

"Aren't we all?"

"D'you know, Bee, I must confess I have the greatest difficulty in connecting the two."

"The two? Simon and Patrick?"

"No. Patrick and Brat."

There was a moment's silence, filled with the soft sound of the rain and the strokes of Eleanor's brush.

"You mean you-don't think he is Patrick?"

Eleanor stopped brushing and looked up, her eyes wide with surprise. "Of course he's Patrick," she said, astonished. "Who else would he be?" She put down the brush and began to tie up her hair in a blue ribbon. "It's just that I have no feeling of ever having met him before. Odd, isn't it? When we spent nearly twelve years of our lives together. I like him; don't you?"

"Yes," Bee said. "I like him." She, too, had no feeling of ever having met him before, and she too did not see "who else he could be."

"Did Patrick not smile very often?"

"No; he was a serious child."

"When Brat smiles I want to cry."

"Good heavens, Eleanor."

"You can 'good heavens' all you like, but I expect you know what I mean."

Bee thought that she did.

"Did he tell you why he didn't write to us all those years?"

"No. There wasn't much opportunity for confidences."

"I thought you might have asked him when you were going round the paddocks with him this evening."

"No. He was too interested in the horses."

"Why do *you* think he didn't take any interest in us after he left?"

"Perhaps he took what old Nannie used to call a 'scunner' to us. It's not so surprising, in a way, as the fact that he ran away in the first place. The urge to put Latchetts behind him must have been overwhelming."

"Yes. I suppose so. But he was such a kind person: Pat. And so fond of us all. He mightn't have wanted to come back, but you would have thought he'd want to let us know that he was safe."

Since this was her own private stumbling-block, Bee had no help to offer.

"It must have been difficult to come back," Eleanor said, running the comb through her brush. "He looked so tired to-night that he looked like a *dead* man. It's not a very lively face at the best of times, is it? If you chopped it off behind the ears and hung it on a wall, no one would know the difference."

Bee knew Eleanor well enough, and agreed with her sufficiently, to translate this successfully.

"You don't think he'll want to sheer off again once the excitement of coming home has worn off?"

"Oh, no, I'm quite sure he won't."

"You think he is here for keeps?"

"Of course I do."

But Brat, standing in the dark before the open window of his room and looking at the curve of the down in the wet starlight, was wondering about that very matter. The thing had succeeded beyond Loding's most extravagant promises, and now?

Where did he go from here? How long would it be before Simon had him cold? And if Simon failed, how long could he go on living a life where at any moment someone might spring a mine?

That is what he had set out to do, of course. But somehow he had not really looked beyond the first stages. In his heart he had been unable to believe that he would succeed. Now that success was his he felt rather like someone who has climbed a pinnacle and can't get down again. Elated but misgiving.

He turned from the window and switched the lamp on. His landlady in Pimlico used to say that she "was so tired that she felt as if she'd been through a mangle"; he knew now how good a description that had been. That was exactly how he felt. Wrung out and

empty. So limp that it was an effort to lift a hand to undress. He pulled off his nice new suit-the suit that had made him feel so guilty in that other life way back in London-and made himself hang it up. He peeled off his underclothes and stumbled into his faded old pyjamas. He wondered for a moment whether they would mind if the rain came in and marked the carpet, but decided to risk it. So he left the window wide open and got into bed.

He lay for a long time listening to the quiet sound of the rain and looking at the room. Now was the time for Pat Ashby's ghost to come and chill that room. He waited for the ghost but it did not come. The room was warm and welcoming. The figures on the wallpaper, the figures that those children had grown up with, looked friendly and alive. He turned his head to look at the groups by the bedside. To look for the one Eleanor had been in love with. The chap with the profile. He wondered if she was in love with anyone

His eyes went on to the wood of the bedstead, and he remembered that this was Alec Loding's bed, and was pleased once more by the irony of it all. It was fantastically right that he should come to Latchetts only to sleep in Alec Loding's bed. He must tell him one day. It was the kind of thing that Loding would appreciate.

He wondered whether it was Eleanor or Bee who had put the flowers in the bowl. Flowers to welcome him-home.

Latchetts, he said to himself, looking at the room. This is Latchetts. I'm here. This is Latchetts.

The sound of the word was a soporific; like the swing of a hammock. He put out his hand and switched off the light. In the dark the rain suddenly sounded louder.

This morning he had got up and dressed in that back room under the slates, with the crowding chimney-pots beyond the window. And here he was, going to sleep in Latchetts, with the sweet cold smell of the down blowing in on the damp air from the window.

As sleep drew him under he had an odd feeling of reassurance. A feeling that Pat Ashby didn't mind his being there; that he was on the contrary pleased about it all.

The unlikeliness of this roused him a little, and his thoughts, running on approval and disapproval, went to Bee. What was it that he had felt when Bee took his hand to lead him to the interview this afternoon? What was different from any other of the thousand handclasps he had experienced in his time? Why the surge of warmth under his heart, and what kind of emotion was it anyway? He had suffered the same obscure gratification when Bee had thrust her arm through his on the way to the stables. What was so remarkable about a woman putting her hand on your arm? A woman, moreover, that you were not in love with, and were never likely to be in love with.

It was because she was a woman, of course, but the thing that made it remarkable was something else again. It had something to do with being taken for granted by her. No one else had taken his hand in just that way. Casual but-no, not possessive. Quite a few had been possessive with him, and he had not been gratified in the least. Casual but-what? Belonging. It had something to do with belonging. The hand had taken him for granted because he belonged. It was the unthinking friendliness of a woman to one of her family. Was it because he had never «belonged» before, that made that commonplace gesture into a benediction?

He went on thinking of Bee as he fell asleep. Her sidelong glance when she was considering something; her courage; the way she had braced herself to meet him that day in the back room in Pimlico; the way she had kissed him before she was sure, just in case he was Patrick; the way she had dealt with the suspense of Simon's absence when he arrived to-day.

She was a lovely woman, Beatrice Ashby, and he loved her.

He had reached the toppling-over place of sleep when he was yanked of a sudden wide awake.

He had remembered something.

He knew now who it was that Simon Ashby reminded him of.

It was Timber.

On Wednesday morning Bee took him to call on the tenants of the three farms: Frenchland, Upacres, and Wigsell. "Gates last; just to larn him," Bee said. Gates was last also in importance, since Wigsell was the smallest of the three farms. It had originally been the home farm of Latchetts and lay just beyond the Rectory, on the slope north of the village. It was almost too small a farm to be self-supporting, but Gates also ran the butcher's shop in the village (open twice a week) and was not dependent on what he made from Wigsell.

"Do you drive, Brat?" Bee asked, as they prepared to get into the car.

"Yes, but I'd rather you did. You know the"-"road" he had almost said-"the car better."

"Nice of you to call it a car. I expect you're used to a left-hand drive."

"Yes."

"I'm sorry it had to be the bug. It isn't often the car goes wrong on us. Jameson has all its inside out on the garage floor, and is conducting a post-mortem in a silent fury."

"I like the bug. I came from the station in it yesterday."

"So you did. What a very long time ago that seems. Does it seem like that to you?"

"Yes." It seemed years away to him.

"Have you heard that we've been saved from the *Clarion*?" she asked, as they sped down the avenue to the accompaniment of the bug's sewing-machine song.

"No?"

"Are you not a consumer of the Press at breakfast?" asked Bee, who had breakfasted at eight o'clock.

"I never lived where we had papers to read at breakfast. We just switched on the radio."

"Oh, lord, yes. I forget that your generation doesn't have to read."

"How have we been saved?"

"We have been rescued by three people we never heard of, and are never likely to meet. The fourth wife of a Manchester dentist, the husband of a principal boy, and the owner of a black leather trunk." She pressed the horn and turned slowly to the right out of the avenue. "The owner of the trunk left it at Charing Cross with someone's arms and legs in it. Or, of course, it may be the owner's arms and legs. That is a question which will occupy the *Clarion* for some time to come, I expect. The husband of the principal boy is suing for alienation of affection, and none of the three people concerned has ever been bothered with an inhibition, which is very nice for the *Clarion*. Since the reports of divorce cases have been pruned the *Clarion* has been suffering from frustration, and a suit for alienation of affection is a gift from heaven. Especially when it is Tattie Thacker's affections." She looked with pleasure at the morning. "I do like a morning after rain."

"You've still one to come?"

"What?"

"The fourth wife of the Manchester dentist."

"Oh. Yes. She, poor wretch, has just been exhumed from a very expensive and elaborate tomb and found to be loaded with arsenic. Her husband is found to be missing."

"And you think that the *Clarion* will be too busy to bother about-us?"

"I'm sure of it. They haven't room as it is for all they want to do with Tattie. She had a whole page to herself this morning. If they ever bothered about the Ashbys they would print the report in a tiny paragraph at the bottom of a page, and five million people would read it and not be able to tell you two minutes later what was in it. I think we are quite safe. The *Westover Times* will have one of their usual discreet paragraphs this morning, and that will be the end of the matter."

Well, that was another snag out of the way. In the meantime he must keep his wits alive for the visits to Frenchland and Upacres. He was supposed to know these people.

Frenchland was farmed by a tall rosy old man and his tall sallow sister. "Everyone was terrified of Miss Hassell," Loding had said. "She had a face like a witch, and a tongue that took the skin off you. She didn't talk; just made one remark and you found that you were raw."

"Well, this is an honour," old Mr. Hassell said, coming to the garden gate and seeing whom Bee had with her. "Mr. Patrick, I'm glad to see you. I'm tarnation glad to see you." He took Brat's hand in his gnarled old fist and closed on it with his other one. There was no doubt that he was glad to see Patrick Ashby again.

It was difficult to know whether Miss Hassell was glad or not. She eyed Brat while she shook hands with him and said: "This is an unexpected pleasure." Her dry use of the conventional phrase and its wicked appropriateness amused Brat.

"Foreign parts don't seem to have changed you much," she said, as she set out glasses in the crowded little parlour.

"I've changed in one way," Brat said.

"You have?" She wasn't going to gratify him by asking in what way.

"I'm not frightened of you any more."

Old Mr. Hassell laughed.

"You beat me there, son. She still puts the fear of God in me. If I'm half an hour late getting home from market I creep up the lane with my tail down like I was a sheep-stealer."

Miss Hassell said nothing, but Brat thought there was a new interest in her glance; almost as if she were pleased with him. And she went away and fetched some shortbread from the kitchen which she had obviously had no intention of producing before.

They drank a liquid called White Port Wine Type, and discussed Rhode Island Reds.

At Upacres there was only plump Mrs. Docket, and she was busy making butter in the dairy at the back.

"Come in, whoever you are!" she called, and they went down the cool tiled passage from the open front door, and turned into the chill of the dairy.

"I can't stop this," she said, looking round at them. "The butter is just — Oh, goodness, I didn't know! I just thought it was someone passing. The children are all at school and Carrie is out in the barn and — Goodness! To think of it!"

Bee automatically took her place at the churn while she shook hands with Brat.

"Well, well," said kind plump Mrs. Docket, "a fine, good-looking Ashby you are. You're more like Mr. Simon than ever you were." Brat thought that Bee looked up with interest when she said that.

"It's a happy day for us all, Miss Ashby, isn't it? I could hardly believe it. I just said to Joe, I don't believe it, I said. It's the kind of thing that happens in books. And in pictures and plays. Not the kind of thing that would happen to quiet folk like us in a quiet place like Clare, I said. And yet here you are and it's really happened. My, Mr. Patrick, it's nice to see you again, and looking so well and bonny."

"Can I have a shot at that?" Brat asked, indicating the churn. "I've never handled one of those things."

"But of course you have!" Mrs. Docket said, looking taken aback. "You used to come in special on Saturday mornings to have a go at it."

Brat's heart missed a beat. "Did I?" he said. "I've forgotten that."

Always say quite frankly that you don't remember, Loding had advised. No one can deny that you don't remember, but they will certainly jump on you if you try to make-believe about anything.

"I thought you did this by electricity now," he heard Bee say as she made way for him at the churn.

"Oh, we do everything else by electricity, of course," Mrs. Docket said. "But I can't believe it makes good butter. No more homemade taste to it than you'd get at the International in Westover. Sometimes when I'm rushed I switch on the electricity, but I'm always sorry afterwards. Awful *mechanical*, it is. No artfulness about it."

They drank hot black tea and ate light floury scones and discussed the children's schooling.

"She's a darling, Mrs. Docket," Bee said as they drove away. "I think she is still of the opinion in her heart of hearts that electricity is an invention of the devil."

But Brat was thoughtful. He must stop himself from volunteering remarks. It was not important about the churn, but it quite easily might have been something vital. He must be less forthcoming.

"About Friday, Brat," Bee said, as they made their way back to Clare and to Wigsell.

"What is on Friday?" said Brat, out of his absorption.

Bee looked round and smiled at him. "Your birthday," she said.

Of course. He was now the possessor of a birthday.

"Had you forgotten that you are going to be twenty-one on Friday?" she asked.

"I had, almost." He caught her sidelong look at him. After a pause she said: "You came of age a long time ago, didn't you." She said it without smiling and it was not a question.

"About Friday," she went on. "I thought that since we have postponed the celebrations for Uncle Charles's benefit, we wouldn't have a party on Friday. Mr. Sandal will be coming down with the papers he wants you to sign, so we shall have him to lunch, and make it just a quiet family party."

Papers to sign. Yes, he had known that there would be papers to sign sooner or later. He had even learned to make his capital letters the way Patrick did, thanks to an old exercise book that Loding had unearthed and filched from the Rectory. And, after all, signing a paper didn't make him any more of a heel than he was being at this moment. It just put him more surely in the Law's reverence, made the thing irrevocable.

"Is that how you would like it?"

"What? Oh, the birthday. Yes, of course. I don't want a party. I don't want a celebration, if it comes to that. Can't we just take this coming-of-age for granted?"

"I don't think the neighbourhood would be very pleased if we did. They are all looking forward to some kind of party. I think we shall have to give them one. Even the invitation cards are all ready. I altered the date to a fortnight after Charles's arrival. He is due in about twenty-three days. So you'll have to 'thole' it, as old Nannie used to say."

Yes, he would have to thole it. Anyhow, he could sit back now and relax for a little. He was not supposed to know the Gates family. They were coming back to the village now; the white rails of the south paddocks on their left. It was a washed and shining morning, but it had an uneasy glitter. The sky was metallic, and the light had a silver edge to it.

As they passed the entrance to the Rectory Bee said: "Alec Loding came down for the week-end not long ago."

"Oh? What is he doing now?"

"Still playing roue parts in dreadful little comedies and farces. You know: four characters, five doors, and one bed. I didn't see him, but Nancy said he had improved."

"In what way?"

"Oh, more interested in other people. Kindlier. He even made efforts to get on with George. Nancy thought age was beginning to tell. He was quite happy to sit for hours with a book in George's study when George was out. And when George was in they would yarn quite happily. Nancy was delighted. She has always been fond of Alec, but she used to dread his visits. The country bored him and George bored him even more, and he never bothered to hide it. So it was a pleasant change."

Half-way through the village they turned into the lane that led to Wigsell.

"You don't remember Emmy Vidler, do you?" she asked Brat. "She was brought up at Wigsell, and married Gates when he had a farm the other side of Bures. When her father died, Gates put a bailiff into his farm and took over Wigsell. And, of course, the butcher's shop. So they are very comfortably off. The boy couldn't stand his father, and got himself a job in the Midlands somewhere;

engineering. But the girl lives at home, and is the apple of her father's eye. She went to an expensive boarding school, where I understand she was known as Margot. Her name is Peggy."

They swung into the farm entrance and came to rest on the small old cobbles of the yard. Two dogs rushed at them in wild self-importance, yelling their arrival to the world.

"I do wish Gates would train his dogs," said Bee, whose dogs were as well-trained as her horses.

The clamour brought Mrs. Gates to the front door. She was a faded and subdued little woman who must once have been very pretty. "Glen! Joy! Be quiet!" she called, ineffectually, and came forward to greet them. But before she reached them Gates came round the corner of the house, and in a few strides had anticipated her. His pompous welcome drowned her more genuine pleasure, and she stood smiling gently at Brat while her husband trumpeted forth their satisfaction in seeing Patrick Ashby on their doorstep again.

Gates was a large, coarse individual, but Brat supposed that once he had had the youthful vigour and assurance that appealed to pretty, fragile little women like Emmy Vidler.

"They tell me that you've been making money in horses over there," he said to Brat.

"I've earned my living from them," Brat said.

"You come and see what I've got in *my* stable." He began to lead the way to the back of the house.

"But Harry, they must come in and sit down for a little," his wife protested.

"They'll sit down presently. They'd much rather look at a piece of good horseflesh than at your gewgaws. Come along, Mr. Patrick. Come along, Miss Ashby. Alfred!" he bellowed as they went down the yard. "Turn out that new horse for Miss Ashby to see."

Mrs. Gates, tailing along behind, found herself side by side with Brat. "I am so happy about this," she said quietly. "So happy about your coming back. I remember you when you were little; when I lived here in my father's day. Except for my own son I've never been so fond of a small boy as I was of you."

"Now then, Mr. Patrick, have a look at this here, have a look at this! Tell me if that doesn't fill the eye for you."

Gates swept his great limb of an arm at the stable door where Alfred was leading out a brown horse that looked oddly out of place in the small farmyard, even in a region where every small farmer kept a mount that would carry him across country in the winter. There was no denying it, the brown horse was something exceptional.

"There! what do you think of that, eh? What do you think of that?"

Bee, having looked, said: "But that, surely, is the horse that Dick Pope won the jumping on at the Bath Show last year."

"That's the horse," Gates said complacently. "And not only the jumping. The cup for the best riding horse in the show. Cost me a pretty penny, that did, but I can afford it and nothing's too good for my girl. Oh ah! It's for Peggy I bought it. That wouldn't carry me, that wouldn't." He gave an abrupt shout of laughter; at least Brat supposed it was laughter. "But my girl, now, she's a feather in the saddle. I don't have to tell you, Miss Ashby; you've seen her. There's no one in the county deserves a good horse better than my Peggy, and I don't grudge the money for it."

"You've certainly got a good horse, Mr. Gates," Bee said, with an enthusiasm in her voice that surprised Brat. He looked across at her and wondered why she was looking so pleased. After all, this brown horse was a potential rival to Timber, and all the other Latchetts' animals.

"Got a vet's certificate with it, I need hardly say. I don't buy pigs in pokes."

"Is Peggy going to show it this year?"

"Of course she is, of course she is. What did I buy it for but for her to show?"

Bee's face was positively blissful. "How nice!" she said, and she sounded rapturous.

"Do you like it, Miss Ashby?" Peggy Gates said, appearing at Brat's side.

Peggy was a very pretty creature. Pink and white and gold. Brat thought that if it were possible to cross Miss Parslow and Eleanor the result would probably be Peggy Gates. She accepted her introduction to Brat with composure, but managed to convey the impression that it was personally delightful to her to have Patrick home again. Her small hand lay in his with a soft pressure that was intimate rather than friendly. Brat shook it heartily and resisted a temptation to wipe his palm down his hip.

She accepted Bee's congratulations on her possession of the horse, allowed a decent interval for further contemplation of it, and then with an admirable display of social dexterity, lifted the whole family from the yard into the drawing-room of the house. It was called the drawing-room, and was furnished as such, but Bee, who remembered it as old Mrs. Vidler's parlour, thought the water-colours and wistaria wallpaper a poor exchange for the lustre jugs and framed engravings of Mrs. Vidler's day.

They drank very good madeira and talked about the Bures Agricultural Show.

And they drove home with Bee still looking as if someone had left her a fortune. She caught Brat's considering look at her and said: "Well?"

"You look like a cat that has been given cream," he said.

She gave him her sideways, amused glance. "Cream and fish and liver," she said; but did not tell him the translation.

"When all the fuss of Friday is over, Brat," she said, "you must go up to town and get yourself a wardrobe. Walters will take weeks to make your evening things, and you'll need them for the celebration when Uncle Charles comes home."

"What shall I get?" he asked, at a loss for the first time.

"I should leave it to Walters, if I were you."

"Outfit for a young English gentleman," Brat said.

And she looked sideways again, surprised by the twist in his voice.

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Eleanor came into the sitting-room as Bee was opening the midday post, and said: "She bumped!"

Bee looked up hazily, her mind still on the contents of her mail.

"She bumped, I tell you. For a whole fifty yards she bumped like a good 'un."

"The Parslow girl? Oh, congratulations, Nell, dear."

"I never thought I'd live to see this day. Is no one having sherry?"

"Brat and I have drunk sufficient strange liquids this morning to last us for the rest of the week."

"How did it go, Brat?" Eleanor asked, pouring herself some sherry.

"Not as badly as I'd been prepared for," Brat said, watching her thin capable hand manipulating the glasses. That hand wouldn't lie soft and confidential and insinuating in one's own.

"Did Docket tell you how he got his wound?"

"Docket was at market," Bee said. "But we had hot buttered scones from Mrs. Docket."

"Dear Mrs. Docket. What did Miss Hassell give you?"

"Shortbread. She wasn't going to give us that, but she succumbed to Brat's charms." So Bee had noticed that.

"I'm not surprised," Eleanor said, looking at Brat over her glass. "And Wigsell?"

"Do you remember that brown horse of Dick Pope's? The one he swept the board with at Bath last year?"

"Certainly."

"Gates has bought it for Peggy."

Eleanor stopped sipping sherry and thought about this in silence for a moment or two.

"For Peggy to show."

"Yes."

"Well, well!" said Eleanor slowly: and she looked amused and thoughtful. She looked at Bee, met Bee's glance, and looked away again. "Well, well!" she said again, and went on sipping sherry. After an interval broken only by the rip of paper as Bee opened envelopes, she said: "I don't know that that was such a very good move."

"No," said Bee, not looking up.

"I'm going to wash. What is for lunch?"

"Goulash.'

"As made by our Mrs. Betts, that is just stew."

The twins came in from lessons at the Rectory, and Simon from the stables, and they went in to lunch.

Simon had come down so late to breakfast that Brat's only intercourse with him to-day had been to wish him good morning. He seemed amiable and relaxed, and inquired with what appeared to be genuine interest about the success of the morning. Bee provided an account, with periodic confirmation from Brat. When she came to Wigsell, Eleanor interrupted her to say:

"Did you know that Gates has bought Peggy a new horse?"

"No," Simon said, looking up with mild interest.

"He has bought her that brown horse of Dick Pope's."

"Riding Light?"

"Yes. Riding Light. She is going to show it this year."

For the first time since he had met him Brat saw Simon Ashby flush. He paused for a moment, and then went on with his lunch. The flush slowly died, and the cool pale profile resumed its normal calm. Both Eleanor and Bee had avoided looking at him while he absorbed the news, but Ruth studied him with interest.

And Brat, eating Mrs. Betts's goulash, studied him with his mind. Simon Ashby was reputedly crazy about the Gates girl. But was he glad that the girl had been given a good horse? No. He was furious. And what was more, his womenfolk had known that he would be furious. They had known beforehand that he would find Peggy's entry as a rival unforgivable. They had, understandably, not wanted the Gates affair to last or to become serious; and they had recognised instantly, both of them, that Peggy's possession of Riding Light had saved them. What kind of creature was this Simon Ashby, who could not bear to be beaten by the girl he was in love with?

He remembered Bee's inordinate pleasure in the brown horse. He saw again Eleanor's slow amusement at the news. They had known at once that that was the end of the Peggy affair. Gates had bought that horse to be «upsides» with Latchetts; to give his daughter a mount as good as any owned by the man he hoped she would marry. And all he had done was to destroy any chance that Peggy ever had of being mistress of Latchetts.

Well, Simon was no longer master of Latchetts, so it would not matter to the Gates family that Simon resented Peggy's possession of the horse. But what kind of heel was Simon that he could not love a rival?

"What is Brat going to ride at the Bures Show," he heard Eleanor say, and brought his attention back to the lunch table.

"All of them," Simon said. And as Eleanor looked her question: "They are his horses."

This was the kind of thing that the English did not say. Simon must be very angry to desert the habit of a lifetime.

"I'm not going to 'show' any horses, if that is what you mean," Brat said. "That requires technique, and I haven't got it."

"But you used to be very good," Bee said.

"Did I? Oh, well, that is a long time ago. I certainly don't want to show any horses in the ring at Bures."

"The show isn't for nearly three weeks yet," Eleanor said. "Bee could coach you for a day or two, and you'd be as good as ever."

But Brat was not to be moved. It would have been fun to see what he could do against English horsemen; fun especially to jump

the Latchetts horses and perhaps win with them; but he was not going to make any public appearance as Patrick Ashby of Latchetts if he could help it.

"Brat could ride in the races," Ruth said. "The races they end up with. He could beat everyone on Timber, couldn't he?"

"Timber is not going to be knocked about in any country bumpkins' race if I still have any say in the matter," Simon said, speaking into his plate. "He is going to Olympia, which is his proper place."

"I agree," Brat said. And the atmosphere ceased to be tense. Jane wanted to know why fractions were vulgar, and Ruth wanted a new bicycle tire, and the conversation became the normal family conversation of any meal-time in any home.

Before lunch was over the first of the visitors arrived; and the steady stream went on, from after-luncheon coffee, through tea, to six o'clock drinks. They had all come to inspect Brat, but he noticed that those who had known Patrick Ashby came with a genuine pleasure in welcoming him back. Each of them had some small memory of him to recount, and all of them had kept the memory green because they had liked Pat Ashby and grieved for him. And Brat caught himself being gratified in an absurd and proprietorial way, as if some protege of his own was being praised. The light that had been shed on Simon this morning made him more than ever Patrick's champion. It was all wrong that Latchetts should have been Simon's all those years. It was Patrick's inheritance and it was all wrong that Patrick should not be here to inherit it. Patrick was all right. Patrick would not have gone sick with rage because his best girl had a better horse than he had. Patrick was all right.

So he accepted the small verbal gifts on Patrick's behalf and was pleased and gratified.

About the time when tea-cups were being mixed up with cocktail glasses the local doctor appeared, and Brat ceased to be gratified, and became interested in Eleanor's reactions to the doctor. Eleanor seemed to like the doctor very much, and Brat, knowing nothing whatever about him, was straightway convinced that he was not good enough for her. The only guests left now were Colonel Smollett, the Chief Constable for the county; the two Misses Byrne, who occupied the Jacobean house at the far end of the village and, according to Bee, had their walls hung with "plates and warming-pans, and other kitchen utensils"; and Dr. Spence. Dr. Spence was young and red-haired and bony, and he had freckles and a friendly manner. He was the successor of the old country doctor who had brought the whole Ashby family up, and he was, so Bee confided in an interval of tea-pouring, "much too brilliant to stay in a country practice." Brat wondered if he stayed for Eleanor's sake; he seemed to like Eleanor very much.

"You caused us a lot of trouble, young man," Colonel Smollett had said, greeting him; and Brat, after the polite evasions he had experienced so far, was glad of his frankness. Just as his notions of English middle-class had been derived from American films, so his idea of a colonel had been derived from the English Press, and was equally erroneous. Colonel Smollett was a small, thin man with a beaked nose and a self-effacing manner. What one noticed about him was his extraordinary neatness and his gay blue eyes.

The Colonel gave the Misses Byrne a lift in his car, but the doctor lingered, and it was only when Bee asked him to stay for dinner that he pulled himself together and went.

"Poor Dr. Spence," Bee said at dinner. "I'm sorry he wouldn't stay. I'm sure that landlady of his starves him."

"Nonsense," said Simon, who had recovered his good temper and had been very bright all the afternoon; "that lean, red-haired type always look underfed. Besides, he wouldn't have eaten, anyhow. All he wants is to sit and look at Eleanor."

Which confirmed Brat's worst fears.

But all Eleanor said was: "Don't be absurd"; and she said it without heat and without interest.

They were all tired by dinner-time, and it was a quiet meal. The excitement of having Brat there had died into acceptance, and they no longer treated him as a newcomer. Even the unforthcoming Jane had stopped accusing him with her eyes. He was part of the landscape. It was wonderfully restful to be part of the landscape again. For the first time since he came to Latchetts he was hungry.

But as he got ready for bed he puzzled over the problem of Simon. Simon, who was quite sure that he was not Patrick, but had no intention of saying so. (Why? Because he would not be believed, and his protest would be put down to resentment at his brother's return? Because he had plans for a dramatic unveiling? Because he had some better way of dealing with an impostor who would not be unveiled?) Simon, who was so good a dissembler that he could fool his own family about his inmost feelings. Simon, who was so self-centred, so vain, that to come between him and the sun was to insult him. Simon, who had charm enough for ten men, and an appealing air of vulnerability. Simon, who was like Timber.

He stood again at the open window in the dark, looking at the curve of the down against the sky. Perhaps because he was less tired to-night he was no longer so afraid; but the incalculable factor in this life that he was due to lead was still Simon.

If Simon so resented Peggy Gates's owning a better horse than his, what, wondered Brat, could have been his reaction to Patrick's sudden succession to Latchetts?

He considered this a long time, staring into the dark.

And as he turned at last to put the light on, a voice in his mind said: I wonder where Simon was when Patrick went over the cliff.

But he noticed the heinousness of this at once, of course. What was he suggesting? Murder? In Latchetts? In Clare? By a boy of thirteen? He was letting his antipathy to Simon run away with his common sense.

The suicide of Patrick Ashby had been a police affair. An affair of inquest and evidence. The thing had been investigated, and the police had been satisfied that it was in truth suicide.

Satisfied? Or just without a case?

Where would that coroner's report be now? In the police records he supposed. And it was not easy for a civilian to persuade the police to satisfy an idle curiosity; they were busy people.

But the thing must have been reported in the local Press. It must have been a local sensation. Somewhere in the files there would be an account of that inquest, and he, Brat Farrar, would unearth it at the first opportunity.

Antipathy or no antipathy, common sense or no common sense, he wanted to know where Simon Ashby was when his twin went over the Westover cliffs.

Mr. Sandal was to come on Thursday night and stay over till after luncheon on Friday.

On Thursday morning Bee said that she was going into Westover to do some special shopping for Mr. Sandal's meals, and what would Brat like to do with his day?

Brat said that he would like to come with her and see Westover again, and Bee looked pleased.

"We can stop on the way through the village," she said, "and let Mrs. Gloom run her eye over you. It will be one less for you to meet after church on Sunday."

So they stopped at the newsagent's, and Brat was exhibited, and Mrs. Gloom sucked the last ounce of satisfaction out of the drama of his return, and they laughed together about her as they sped away to the sea.

"People who can't sing are horribly frustrated," Bee said, after a little.

Brat considered this non sequitur. "The highest mountain in Britain is Ben Nevis," he said, proffering one in his turn.

Bee laughed at that and said: "No, I just meant that I should like to sing at the top of my voice, but I can only croak. Can you sing?" "No. I croak too. We could croak together."

"I doubt if it is legal to croak in a built-up area. One never knows nowadays. And anyhow, there is that." She waved her hand at a large sign which read:

MOTORISTS. PLEASE REFRAIN FROM USING YOUR HORN. THIS IS A HOSPITAL.

Brat glanced up at the building, set on the slope above the town, and remarked that it was uncommonly pretty for a hospital.

"Yes; much less terrifying than the normal place. It is a great pity that that was allowed to happen." She jerked her chin at the row of cheap shops on the opposite side of the road; some of them not much better than shacks. Dingy cafes, a cobbler's, a bicycle "depot," a seller of wreaths and crosses, a rival seller of flowers, a greengrocer's, and anonymous businesses with windows painted half-way up and odd bills tacked in the window.

They were running down the slope into the town, and this miscellaneous strip of roadside commerce was the last petering-out of the poorer suburbs. Beyond was Westover proper: clean and neat and shining in the reflected light from the sea.

As Bee turned into the car park she said: "You don't want to tail round looking at 'sea-food' for Mr. Sandal's consumption. Go away and amuse yourself, and we'll meet for lunch at the Angel about a quarter to one."

He was some distance away when she called him back. "I forgot to ask if you were short of money. I can lend you some if you — " "Oh, no, thanks; I still have some of what Cosset, Thring and what-you-may-call-'em advanced me."

He went first to the harbour to see the place that he was supposed to have set out from eight years ago. It was filled with coastwise shipping and fishing boats, very gay in the dancing light. He leaned against the warm stones of the breakwater and contemplated it. It was here that Alec Loding had sat painting his "old scow" on the last day of Pat Ashby's life. It was over those cliffs away to the right that Pat Ashby had fallen to his death.

He pushed himself off the breakwater and went to look for the office of the *Westover Times*. It took him some time to find it because, although every citizen of Westover read the local paper, very few of them had occasion to seek it out in its home. Its home was a stone's-throw from the harbour, in a small old house in a small old street which still had its original cobbles. The entrance was so low that Brat instinctively ducked his head as he went in. Beyond, after the bright sunlight outside, there was blackness. But out of the blackness the unmistakable adolescent voice of an office boy said: "Yes?"

Brat said that he would like to see Mr. Macallan.

The voice said that Mr. Macallan was out.

"I suppose you couldn't tell me where I could find him?"

"The fourth table on the left upstairs at the Blue Bird."

"That's explicit."

"Can't help it; that's where he is. That's where he always is, this time of day."

The Blue Bird, it seemed, was a coffee-shop round the corner on the harbour front. And Mr. Macallan was indeed sitting at the fourth table on the left upstairs, which was the one by the far window. Mr. Macallan was sitting with a half-drunk cup of coffee in front of him, glowering down on the bright front. He greeted Brat amiably, however, as one old friend to another, and pulled out a chair for him.

"I'm afraid I haven't been much good to you," Brat said.

"The only way I'll ever get myself on to the front page of the Clarion is in a trunk," Mr. Macallan said.

"A trunk?"

"In sections. And I can't help feeling that would be a wee bit drastic." He spread out that morning's *Clarion* so that the shrieking black print screamed up from the table. The trunk murder was still front-page news after three days, it having been discovered that the legs in the case belonged to two different persons; a complication which put the present case *hors concurs* in the trunk-murder class.

"What's horrible about murder," Mr. Macallan said reflectively, "is not that it happens, but that it happens to your Aunt Agnes, if you follow me. Hi! *Miss!* A cup of coffee for my friend here. Brother Johnny goes to the war and gets killed and it is all very sad, but no one is shocked-civilisation being what it is. But if someone bumps Aunt Agnes off on her way home one night that *is* a shock. That sort of thing just doesn't happen to people you know."

"It must be worse when someone you know bumps off someone's Aunt Agnes."

"Ay," said Mr. Macallan, shooting an extra spoonful of sugar into his half-cold coffee and stirring it vigorously. "I've seen some of that. Families, you know. It's always the same: they just can't believe it. *Their* Johnny. That is the horror in murder. The domesticity of it." He took out his cigarette case and offered it. "And how do you like being Clare's white-headed boy? Are you glad to be back?"

"You can't imagine how glad."

"After that fine free life in Arizona or Texas or wherever it was? You mean you actually prefer this?" Mr. Macallan jerked his head at the Westover front filled with placid shoppers. And, as Brat nodded: "Mercy-be-here! I can hardly credit it."

"Why? Don't you like the place?"

Mr. Macallan looked down at the southern English walking about in their southern English sunshine, and metaphorically spat. "They're so satisfied with themselves I can't take my eyes off them," he said.

"Satisfied with their lot, you mean? Why not?"

"Nothing in this world came out of satisfaction."

"Except the human race," said Brat.

Mr. Macallan grinned. "I'll allow you that." But he went on glowering down at the bright harbour scene. "I look at them and think: "These people kept Scotland fighting for four hundred years, and I can't find the answer."

"The answer, of course, is that they didn't."

"No? Let me tell you that my country — "

"They've been much too busy for the last thousand years keeping the shores of England. But for them your Scotland would be part of Spain to-day."

This was apparently a new idea to Mr. Macallan. He decided to let it ride.

"You weren't looking for me, were you? When you came to the Blue Bird?"

"Yes. I went to the office first and they told me you would be here. There's something I want and I thought that you might help me to it."

"Not publicity, I take it," Mr. Macallan said dryly.

"No, I want to read my obituary."

"Man, who doesn't! You're a privileged person, Mr. Ashby, a very privileged person."

"I suppose the Westover Times keeps back numbers."

"Och, yes, back to June the 18th, 1827. Or is it June the 28th? I forget. So you want to look at the files. Well, there's not very much, but you'll find it very interesting of course. One's own death must be a fascinating subject to read about."

"You've read about it, then?"

"Och, yes. Before I went out to Latchetts on Tuesday, I naturally looked you up."

So it was that, when they stumbled down the dark stairs to the cellar of the *Westover Times* offices, Mr. Macallan was able to put his hand on the required copy without delay and without raising the dust of a hundred and fifty years about their ears.

"I'll leave you to it," Mr. Macallan said, spreading the volume open under the naked light above the old-fashioned sloping desk. "Have a good time. If there is anything else I can do for you, just let me know. And drop in when you feel like it."

He trotted up the stone stairs, and the scuffling sound of his shoes faded upwards into the world of men, and Brat was left alone with the past.

The *Westover Times* appeared twice a week: on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Patrick Ashby's death had occurred on a Saturday, so that a single Wednesday issue carried both the announcement of his death and the report of the inquest. As well as the usual announcement inserted by the family in the list of deaths, there was a short news item on the middle page. The *Westover Times* had been owned and run by a Westover family since its founding, and it still kept the stateliness, the good manners, and the reticence of an early Edwardian doctor's brougham plying between Harley Street and Knightsbridge. The paper announced the sad occurrence and offered its sympathy to the family in this great trial which had come to them so soon after the tragic deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Ashby in a flying accident. It offered no information beyond the fact that on Saturday afternoon or evening Patrick Ashby had met his death by falling over the cliffs to the west of the town. An account of the inquest would be found on page five.

On page five there was a whole column on the inquest. A column was not enough, of course, to do justice to the inquest in detail, but all the salient facts were there, and now and then a piece of evidence was reported verbatim.

Saturday afternoon was a holiday for the Ashby children and they were accustomed in the summer to take a «piece» with them and pursue their various interests in the countryside until it was time to come home to their evening meal. No alarm had been raised about Patrick's non-appearance in the evening until he had been missing for several hours. It was taken for granted that he had gone farther than he had intended in his latest hobby of bird-watching, and that he was merely late. When darkness closed down and he still had not come home, telephoned inquiries were sent all round the countryside in an effort to find someone who had seen him, so that if an accident had overtaken him rescue might be directed to the proper locality. When these inquiries proved barren, a search-party was organised to beat all the likely places for the missing boy. The search was conducted both on horse and on foot, and along the roads by car, without success.

In the first light of early morning the boy's jacket was found by a coastguard patrolling along the cliffs. Albert Potticary, the coastguard in question, gave evidence that the coat was lying about fifty yards from the cliff-edge, just where the path from Tanbitches began to descend through the gap to the harbour at Westover. It was lying a few yards off the path on the side nearer the cliff, and was weighted in its place by a stone. It was wet with dew when he picked it up, and the pockets were empty except for a note written in thin ink. The note was the one now shown him. He telephoned the news to the police and at once instituted a search for a body on the beach. No body was found. High tide the previous night had been at seven-twenty-nine, and if the boy had fallen into the water, or if he had fallen before high-water so that his body was taken out by the tide, it would not be washed up again at Westover. No one drowned in the Westover district had ever been washed up nearer than Castleton, away to the west; and most of them farther west than that. He was therefore not hopeful of finding any body when he instituted the search. It was merely routine.

The last person to see Patrick Ashby turned out to be Abel Tusk, the shepherd. He had met the boy in the early afternoon, about half-way between Tanbitches and the cliff.

- Q. What was he doing?
- A. He was lying on his belly in the grass.
- Q. Doing what?
- A. Waiting for a lark.
- Q. What kind of lark?
- A. An English lark.
- Q. Ah, you mean he was bird-watching. Did he appear his normal self?

Yes, Abel said, as far as he could judge Pat Ashby had looked much as usual. Never very «gabby» at any time. A quiet boy? Yes, a nice quiet boy. They discussed birds for a little and then parted. He, Abel Tusk, was on his way into Westover by the cliff path, it being also his own half-holiday. He did not get back until late at night and did not hear about the search for the boy until Sunday morning.

Asked if many people used that cliff path he said no. There were buses from the village that got you into Westover in a tenth of the time, but he didn't care for buses. It was rough walking, the cliff part of the path, and not suitable for the kind of shoes that people going to town would be wearing. So no one but someone like himself who was already on the sea side of Tanbitches hill would think of going to Westover that way.

Bee gave evidence that his parents' deaths had been a great shock to the boy, but that he had taken it well and had seemed to be recovering. She had no reason to think that he contemplated taking his own life. The children separated on Saturday afternoons because their interests were different, so that it was not unusual for Patrick to be alone.

- Q. His twin did not accompany him?
- A. No. Patrick was fascinated by birds, but Simon's tastes are mechanical.
- Q. You have seen the note found in the boy's coat, and you recognise it as the handwriting of your nephew Patrick?
- A. Oh, yes. Patrick had a very individual way of making his capital letters. And he was the only person I know who wrote with a stylograph.

She explained the nature of a stylograph. The one Patrick owned had been black vulcanite with a thin yellow spiral down the barrel. Yes, it was missing. He carried it always with him; it was one of his pet possessions.

Q. Can you think of any reason why this sudden desire to take his own life should overcome him, when he seemed to his friend, the shepherd, to be normally happy in the afternoon?

A. I can only suggest that he *was* normally happy during the afternoon, but that when it was time to turn homeward the thought of going back to a house empty of so much that had made life fine for him was suddenly too much, and that he was overcome by an impulse born of a moment's despair.

And that was the verdict of the court, too. That the boy had succumbed to a passing impulse at a moment when the balance of his mind had been disturbed.

That was the end of the column and that was the end of Patrick Ashby. Brat turned over the pages of the next issue, filled with the small importances of summer-time Westover: shows, bowling competitions, tennis tournaments, council meetings, trade outings; but there was no mention of Pat Ashby. Pat Ashby already belonged to the past.

Brat sat back in the dead quiet of the cellar and thought about it all. The boy lying in the summer grass waiting for his beloved larks to drop out of the sky. And the night coming. And no boy coming home across Tanbitches hill.

Mechanical interests, Bee had said, describing Simon's way of spending his half-holiday. That meant the internal combustion engine, he supposed. It was about the age of thirteen that one did begin to be interested in cars. Simon had probably been innocently tinkering in the garage at Latchetts. Certainly there was no suggestion at the inquest, as reported in the Press, that his whereabouts had been a matter for question.

When he joined Bee for lunch at the Angel he longed to ask her bluntly where Simon had been that afternoon. But of course one could not say: "Where was Simon the afternoon I ran away from home?" It was an utterly pointless question. He must think up some other way of bringing the subject into the conversation. He was distracted by the old head-waiter at the Angel, who had known all the Ashby children and was shaken to the core, apparently, by Patrick's unexpected return. His old hands trembled as they laid the various dishes in front of him, and each dish was accompanied by a quavered "Mr. Patrick, sir," as if he was glad to use the name. But the climax came with the sweet course. The sweet was fruit tart, and he had already served both Bee and Brat, but he returned immediately and with great empressment laid a large meringue on a silver dish in front of Brat's place. Brat gazed at it in surprise and then looked up to find the old man waiting for his comment with a proud smile and tears in his eyes. His mind was so full of Simon that he was not quick enough, and it was Bee who saved the situation.

"How wonderful of Daniel to remember that you always had that!" she said, and Brat followed her lead and the old man went away pleased and moved, mopping his eyes on a dazzling white handkerchief that looked as large as a sheet.

"Thanks," Brat said to Bee. "I hadn't remembered that."

"Dear old Daniel. I think it is almost like seeing his own son coming back. He had three, you know. They all died in one war, and his grandsons all died in the following one. He was very fond of you children, so I expect it is very wonderful for him to see anyone he has loved come back from the dead. What have you been doing with your morning?"

"Reading my obituary."

"How morbid of you. Or, no, of course, it isn't. It is what we all want to do. Did you see little Mr. Macallan?"

"*I* did. He sent his best respects to you. Aunt Bee — "

"You are too old to begin calling me aunt."

"Bee, what were Simon's 'mechanical interests'?"

"Simon never had any mechanical interests as far as I know."

"You said at the inquest that he had."

"I did? I can't imagine what they could have been. What was it apropos of?"

"To explain why we didn't do things together on a Saturday afternoon. What did Simon do when I went bird-watching?" He tried to make it sound like someone trying to remember an old way of life.

"Pottered about, I expect. Simon was always a potterer. His hobbies never lasted longer than a fortnight at the outside."

"So you don't remember what Simon was using for a hobby the day I ran away?"

"It's absurd of me, my dear, but I don't. I don't even remember where he was that day. When something dreadful happens, you know, you push it down in your mind and never bring it up again if you can help it. I do remember that he spent all night out on his pony looking frantically for you. Poor Simon. You did him a bad turn, Brat. I don't know if you realise it. Simon changed after you went. I don't know whether it was the shock of your going or the lack of your sober companionship, but he was a different person afterwards."

Since Brat had no answer to this he ate in silence, and presently she said: "And you did me a bad turn in never writing to me. Why didn't you, Brat?"

This was the weak spot in the whole structure, as Loding had continually pointed out.

"I don't know," he said. "Honestly, I don't know!"

The exasperation and desperation of his tone had an appropriateness that he had not foreseen.

"All right," she said. "I won't worry you, my dear. I didn't mean to. It is just something that has puzzled me. I was so very fond of you when you were small, and we were such very good friends. It was not like you to live a life of your own without once glancing back."

He raked up an offering from the depths of his own experience. "It's easier than you'd think to drop the past behind you when you are fourteen. If you are continually meeting fresh experience, I mean. The past has no greater reality than something you saw in a cinema. No personal reality, I mean."

"I must try running away one day," she said lightly. "There is a lot of the past I should like to drop behind me." And Daniel came with the cheese, and they talked about other things.

Brat had not been prepared to find birthday presents by his plate on Friday morning. He had not, in fact, reckoned with a birthday at all. "All celebration has been postponed until Mr. Charles Ashby comes back to this country," Mr. Sandal had said to him in London, and it was not until Bee had drawn his attention to it that he had remembered that, celebration apart, there would inevitably be a day on which he would become twenty-one. He had had so little experience of birthdays that he had taken it for granted that a postponement of celebration meant a simple verbal congratulation from each member of the family, and he was dismayed by the pile of parcels by his breakfast plate. He quailed at the thought of having to open them in public.

The sardonic light in Simon's eye braced him to the task. He had a suspicion that Simon's punctuality at breakfast this morning was due less to the presence of Mr. Sandal than to the prospect of enjoying his embarrassment over those presents.

"Happy birthday, Brat!" they said, as they came in. "Happy birthday, Brat!" One after another. So that the light benedictions fell round him like confetti.

He wished he didn't feel so bad about it. He wished that they were really his family, and that these were his presents by his plate, and that it was his birthday. It was a very nice thing, a family birthday.

"Are you an opener-before-breakfast or an opener-after, Brat?" Eleanor asked.

"After," he said promptly, and won a breathing-space.

After several cups of strong coffee he might feel braver.

Simon had, as well as presents, a pile of telegrams from the still large numbers of his acquaintances who had not heard of his twin's return, and he opened them as he ate and shared the contents. Having read each message aloud he added a postscript of comment.

"An exact shilling, the cheeseparing adding-machine! And I gave her a wonderful lunch last time I was in town.... What do you imagine Bobby is doing in Skye? He loathes mountains and is a martyr to midges.... Gore and Bowen. I suppose that's to remind me to pay my bill.... I'm sure I don't know anyone called Bert Burt. Do you think he can be a bookie?"

When eventually Brat could no longer postpone the opening of his parcels, his task was made easier by the fact that his presents were for the most part replicas of those Simon was pulling out of his own pile. Mr. Sandal's Georgian sugar-sifter, Bee's silver flask, Eleanor's whip, and the twins' pocket-book, were all duplicated. Only the present from the Rectory was individual. It was a small wooden box that played a tune when the lid was opened. Brat had never seen or heard of such a thing before, and was so delighted with it that he forgot to be self-conscious and became absorbed in it.

"That came from Clare Park," Bee said.

And at that reminder of Loding he came back to reality and shut down the lid on the sweet frail melody.

This morning he was going to sign his soul away. It was no time for tinkling little tunes.

This signing-away was also the subject of surprise. He had imagined in his innocence that various papers would be put in front of him and he would sign them, and that would be that. A matter of twenty minutes at the most. But it proved to be a matter of hours. He and Mr. Sandal sat side by side at the big table in the library, and the whole economic history of Latchetts was laid open for his inspection. Cosset, Thring and Noble were accounting to their young client for the years of his minority.

Brat, a little bewildered but interested, toiled after Mr. Sandal in his progress through the years, and admired the way the old man handled this legal and mathematical exploration.

"Your dear mother's fortune is not what it was in the prosperous days when she inherited it, of course; but it will be sufficient to ensure that you may live at Latchetts in the future without anxiety. As you have observed, the margin of safety has often been very small during the years of your minority, but it was Miss Ashby's wish that there should be no borrowing on the strength of your inheritance from your mother. She was determined that that should come to you intact when you were twenty-one."

He went on laying statements in front of Brat, and for the first time Brat was aware of the struggle and the insecurity that lay behind the assured contentment that Latchetts presented to the eye.

"What happened that year?" he asked, putting his finger on a particularly black record.

Mr. Sandal flipped over some papers. "Ah, yes. I remember. That was a bad year. A very bad year. One of the mares died and two were barren, and a very fine foal broke a leg. A heart-breaking year. It is a precarious way of making a living. That year, for instance," his thin dry finger pointed out another unsatisfactory report, "everything went swimmingly at Latchetts but it happened to be a year when no one was buying and none of the yearlings made their reserve price at the sales. A matter of luck. Merely luck. You will observe that some of the years were exceedingly lucky ones, so that the losses were overtaken."

He left the stables and went on to the farms: the conditions of lease, the improvements, the standing of the tenants, the nature of the crops. Eventually he came to the matter of personal income.

"Your father made a very good income in his profession of consulting engineer, and there seemed, of course, nothing to prevent him making that large yearly sum for a lifetime to come. He therefore spent generously on Latchetts and on the horses that were his hobby. Bought expensive and finely-bred mares, and so on, so that when he died his investments were not very extensive, and death duties had of course to be paid, so the investments had to go."

He slipped another sheet in front of Brat's eye, showing how the duty had been paid without mortgaging Latchetts.

"Miss Ashby has her own income and has never taken an allowance from the Latchetts estate. Except a house-keeping one, that is. The two elder children have had increasing allowances as they grew up. With the exception of some personal possessions-the children's ponies, for instance-the horses in the stable belong to the estate. When the children went to sales to buy for re-selling they were given money by Miss Ashby, and any profit on the improved horses went towards the expenses of Latchetts. I understand, however, that Simon has lately bought one or two with the result of profitable bets, and Eleanor with the result of her efforts as an instructress in the

art of riding. Miss Ashby will no doubt tell you which these are. They do not appear in the relevant papers. The Shetland ponies were Miss Ashby's own venture, and are her own property. I hope that is all clear?"

Brat said that it was.

"Now about the future. It is the Bank's advice that the money left you by your mother should stay invested as it is now. Have you any objection to that?"

"I don't want any lump sum," Loding had said. "I should only blue it, in the first place. And in the second place, it would cause a shocking amount of heart-searching at the bank. We don't want any heart-searching once you're in the saddle. All I want is a cosy little weekly allowance for the rest of my life, so that I can thumb my nose at Equity, and managements, and producers who say that I'm always late for rehearsals. *And* landladies. Riches, my boy, don't consist in having things, but in not having to do something you don't want to do. And don't you forget it. Riches is being able to thumb your nose."

"What income would that bring me, as it is?" Brat asked Mr. Sandal, and Mr. Sandal told him.

That was all right. He could peel Loding's cut off that and still have enough to meet his obligations at Latchetts.

"These are the children's present allowances. The twins, of course, will be going away to school presently, and that will be a charge on the estate for a few years."

He was surprised by the smallness of the allowances. Why, he thought, I made more than that in three months at the dude ranch. It subtly altered his attitude to Simon that Simon in the matter of spending money should have been so much his inferior.

"They're not very big, are they?" he said to Mr. Sandal, and the old man looked taken aback.

"They are in accordance with the size of the estate," he said dryly.

"Well, I think they ought to be stepped up a bit now."

"Yes; that would be quite in order. But you cannot expect to carry two adults as passengers on the estate. It would not be just to the estate. They are both capable of earning their own living."

"What do you suggest, then?"

"I would suggest that Eleanor be given a slightly increased allowance while she lives at Latchetts, or until she marries."

"Is she thinking of getting married?"

"My dear boy, all young ladies think of getting married, especially when they are as pleasant to look upon as your sister. I am not aware, however, that she has so far exhibited any specific interest in the matter."

"Oh. And Simon?"

"Simon's case is difficult. Until a few weeks ago he looked upon Latchetts as his. He is not likely to remain long at Latchetts now, but the slightly increased allowance you suggest could be paid to him while he gives you his services here."

"I don't think that is good enough," said Brat, who was surprised by Mr. Sandal's assumption that Simon would go. Simon showed no signs of going. "I think a bit of the estate is owing to him."

"Morally owing, you mean?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"No doubt you are right, but it is a dangerous assumption which you cannot expect me to countenance. One cannot hand out bits of a financial estate and still keep the said estate in good heart. An allowance is one thing: it comes out of income. But the giving away of the fabric of the thing is to damage its whole structure."

"Well, I suggest that if Simon wants to go away and begin somewhere on his own that the money to start should be lent to him out of the estate at a nominal rate of interest. I suppose if I say without interest you'll jump down my throat."

The old man smiled on him, quite kindly. "I think there is nothing against that. I am looking forward to a period of great prosperity for Latchetts now that the lean years are over. I don't suppose a loan to Simon would greatly incommode the estate. There would be the saving of the allowance to balance it. Now, about the increase in the present allowances — "

They settled the amounts of that.

"Lastly," said Mr. Sandal, "the pensioners."

"Pensioners?"

"Yes. The various dependents of the family who have become too old to work."

For the fourth time that morning Brat was surprised. He looked at the long list and wondered if all established English families had this drain on their income. Mr. Sandal seemed to take it as a matter of course; as much a commonplace of honourable practice as paying one's income tax. Mr. Sandal had frowned on any extravagance where the family was concerned: able-bodied Ashbys must earn their own living. The obligation to support the aged and infirm retainers of the family he took for granted. There was Nannie, who was now ninety-two and lived in a place called New Deer in Scotland; there was an old groom of eighty-nine who lived in the village, and another at Guessgate; there was a cook who had cooked for them until she was sixty-eight and now lived with a daughter of sixty-nine in Horsham; and so on.

He thought of the brassy blonde in the flowered rayon who had bade him welcome to Latchetts. Who would pension her? The country, he supposed. For long and honourable service?

Brat agreed to the continuance of the pensions, and then Simon was called in to do his share of signing. It pleased Brat, who had found it a depressing morning, to notice the sudden widening of Simon's eye as it lighted on his own signature. It was nearly a decade since Simon had set eyes on those capital letters of Patrick's, and here they were blandly confronting him on the library table. That would «larn» him to be sardonic over Brat's efforts to carry off a birthday that was not his.

Then Bee came in, and Mr. Sandal explained the increased provisions in the matter of allowances and the plan for providing for Simon's future. When Simon heard of the plan he eyed Brat thoughtfully; and Brat could read quite plainly what the look said. "Bribery, is that it? Well, it won't work. I'm damned well staying here and you will damned well pay me that allowance." Whatever plans Simon had, they centred round Latchetts.

Bee seemed pleased, however. She put her arm through his to lead him to lunch, and squeezed it. "Dear Brat!" she said.

"I congratulated you both and gave you my good wishes at breakfast," Mr. Sandal said, picking up his glass of claret, "but I should

like now to drink a toast." He lifted his glass to Brat. "To Patrick, who has not only succeeded to his inheritance but has accepted its obligations."

"To Patrick!" they said. "To Patrick!"

"To Patrick!" said Jane, last.

He looked at her and found that she was smiling at him.

Simon took Mr. Sandal to the station in the afternoon, and when they had gone Bee said: "If you want to avoid the social life this afternoon I'll hold the fort for you. I have the books to do, anyhow. Perhaps you would like to take out one of the horses with Eleanor. She has gone back to the stables, I think."

There were few things in life that Brat would have liked so much as to go riding with Eleanor, but there was one thing that he wanted to do more. He wanted, on this day when Pat Ashby should have come into his inheritance, to walk over Tanbitches hill by the path that Pat had taken on the last day of his life.

"I want to go with Brat," Ruth said; and he noticed that Jane lingered to hear the result of this proposition, as if she too might have come. But Bee quashed the suggestion. Brat had had enough of his family for a little, she said.

"But he is going with Eleanor!" protested Ruth.

But Brat said no. He was going walking by himself.

He avoided the avenue, in case that he might meet visitors bound for the house, and went down through the paddocks to the road. In one of the paddocks that bordered the avenue Eleanor was lunging a bay colt. He stood under the trees and watched her; her unruffled patience, her mastery of the puzzled and resentful youngster; the way she managed, even at the end of a long rein, to reassure him. He wondered if that doctor fellow knew anything about horses.

The turf on Tanbitches delighted him. He had not had turf like that underfoot since he was a child. He walked slowly upward, smelling the grassy smell and watching the great cloud shadows flying before the wind. He bore away from the path towards the crown of beeches on the hill-top. If he went up there he would be able to see the whole slope of the countryside to the cliff edge; the countryside that Pat Ashby had shared with the larks.

As he came level with the green clump of bushes and young trees that marked the old quarry, he found an old man sitting in its shelter eating solid slabs of bread and jam, and gave him a greeting as he passed.

"Proud, a'nt yu!" said the old man tartly.

Brat swung on his heel and stared.

"Wonderful dentical and Frenchy furrin parts makes folks, surely."

He took another large bite and surveyed Brat from under the battered felt of his hat.

"Dunnamany nests you'd never seen but fur me."

"Abel!" said Brat.

"Well, that's summat," said the old man grudgingly.

"Abel!" said Brat, and sat down beside him. "Am I glad to see you!"

"Adone do!" Abel said to his dog, who came out from under the spread of his coat to sniff at the newcomer.

"Abel!" He could hardly believe that yesterday's occupant of a newspaper morgue was here in the flesh.

Abel began to exhibit signs of gratification at this undoubted enthusiasm for his society, and allowed that he had recognised him afar off. "Lame, are yu?"

"Just a bit."

"Bruck?"

"Yes."

"Weren't never one to make a pucker," Abel said, approving his laconic acceptance of bad luck.

Brat propped his back against the stout wooden fencing that kept the sheep from the quarry face, took out his cigarette case, and settled down for the afternoon.

In the hour that followed he learned a great deal about Pat Ashby, but nothing that helped to explain his suicide. Like everyone else, old Abel had been shocked and surprised by the boy's death, and now felt that his disbelief in a suicidal Patrick had been vindicated.

Patrick "weren't never one to make a pucker," no matter how "tedious bad" things were.

The old shepherd walked with him to the beeches, and Brat stayed there and watched man and dog grow small in the distance. Long after they were indistinguishable he stayed there, soothed by the loneliness and the great «hush» of the wind in the beech trees. Then he followed them down into the green plain until he came to the path, and let it lead him back over the hill to Clare.

As he came down the north slope to the road, a familiar «clink-clink» came up to him on the wind. For a moment he was back on the Wilson ranch, with the forge glowing in the thin mountain air and-what was her name? — Cora waiting for him beyond the barn when he was tidied up after supper. Then he remembered where the forge was: in that cottage at the foot of the hill. It was early yet. He would go and see what an English smithy looked like.

It looked very like the Wilson one, when at last he stood in the doorway, except that the roof was a good deal lower. The smith was alone, his mate being no doubt an employee and subject to a rationing of labour, and he was fashioning horse-shoes. He looked up as Brat darkened the doorway, and gave him a greeting without pausing in his work. Brat watched him for a little in a companionable quiet, and then moved over to work the bellows for him. The man looked up and smiled. He finished what he was doing at the moment and then said: "I didn't know you against the light. I'm unaccountable glad to see you in my place again, Mr. Patrick."

"Thanks, Mr. Pilbeam."

"You're a deal handier with that thing than you used to be."

"I've earned my living at it since I saw you last."

"You have? Well, I'll be —!" He took a half-made shoe red-hot from the furnace and was about to resume work when he changed his mind and held it out with a grin to Brat. Brat accepted the challenge and made a good job of it, Mr. Pilbeam acting as mate with

critical approval.

"Funny," he said, as Brat plunged the shoe into the water, "if any Ashby was to earn his living at this job it ought to have been your brother."

"Why?"

"You never showed much interest."

"And did Simon?"

"There was a time when I couldn't keep him out of this place. There wasn't anything he wasn't going to make, from a candlestick to gates for the avenue at Latchetts. Far as I remember, all he ever made was a sheep-crook, and that not over-well. But he was always round the place. It was a craze of his for the whole of a summer."

"Which summer was that?"

"Summer you left us, it was. I'd misremember about it, only he was here seeing us put an iron on a cartwheel the day you ran away. I had to shoo him home for his supper."

Brat considered the shoe he had made, while Mr. Pilbeam made ready to call it a day.

"I ought to hang that up," Mr. Pilbeam said, nodding at Brat's handiwork, "and label it: Made by Patrick Ashby of Latchetts. And I couldn't make a better one myself," he added handsomely.

"Give it to old Abel to nail on his door."

"Bless you, old Abel wouldn't have cold iron on his threshold. Keep his visitors away."

"Oh. Friendly with 'them, is he?'

"Do all his washing up and keep his house clean, if you'd believe all you hear."

"I wouldn't put it past him," Brat said. And set out for Latchetts.

So Simon had an alibi. Simon had been nowhere near the cliffs that afternoon. He had never been out of the Clare valley.

And so that was that.

On his way home up the ride between the paddocks he met Jane. Jane had every appearance of "hanging around," and he wondered if it was to intercept him that she lingered there. She was talking to Honey and her foal, and made no effort to efface herself as she had done hitherto at his approach.

"Hullo, Jane," he said, and joined in the intercourse with Honey to give her time. Her small pale face had flushed, and she was evidently struggling with a quite unusual emotion.

"It's about time we were going home to wash up," he suggested at last, as she seemed no nearer speech.

She dropped her hand from Honey's head and turned to face him, braced for effort.

"I wanted to say something to you. Do you mind?"

"Something you want me to do for you?"

"Oh, no. Nothing like that. It's just that I wasn't very nice to you when you came home from America, and I want to apologise."

"Oh, Jane," he said, wanting to take the small brave figure in his arms.

"It wasn't because I wanted to be horrid to you," she said, anxious that he should understand. "It was because-it was because — "

"I know why it was."

"Do you?"

"Yes, of course. It was a very natural thing to feel."

"Was it?"

"In fact, all things considered, it does you credit."

"Then you'll accept my apology?'

"I accept your apology," Brat said gravely, and they shook hands.

She did not immediately put her arm through his as Ruth would have done. She walked beside him in a grown-up fashion, talking politely about the chances of Honey's foal in the market, and what it should be called. The matter of the name was such an absorbing and exciting one that presently she forgot her self-consciousness, so that by the time they reached the house she was chattering unreservedly.

As they crossed the wide gravel sweep, Bee came to the door and stood there watching them come.

"You are going to be late for dinner, you two," she said.

So Brat took possession of Latchetts and of everyone in it, with the exception of Simon.

He went to church on Sunday and submitted to being stared at for an hour and a half with time off for prayers. The only people not in Clare Church that morning were the Nonconformists and three children who had measles. Indeed, there were, as Bee pointed out, several members of the congregation whose normal place of Sunday worship was the blue brick barn at the other end of the village, and who had decided to put up with ritual and prelacy this once in order to share in the sensation of his appearance. As for the orthodox flock, there were individuals there, Bee said, who had not entered a church since their last child was christened. There was even Lana Adams who, as far as anyone knew, had not been in any church since her own baptism in the blue brick barn some twenty years ago.

Brat sat between Bee and Eleanor, and Simon on the other side of Bee. The twins were beyond Eleanor; Ruth wallowing in the drama and singing hymns loudly with a rapt expression, and Jane looking at the congregation with stony disapproval. Brat read the Ashby tablets over and over again, and listened to the Rector's unemphatic voice providing the inhabitants of Clare with their weekly ration of the abstract. The Rector did not preach, in the accepted meaning of the term. He sounded as if he were arguing the matter out for himself; so that, if you shut your eyes, you could be in a chair at the other side of the Rectory fireplace listening to him talk. Brat thought of the fine variety of preachers who had come to take Sunday service at the orphanage: the shouters, the between-you-and-meers, the drama merchants who varied their tones and dropped their voices like amateur reciters, the hearties, the mincing aesthetes; and he thought that George Peck came very well out of the comparison. George Peck really did look as if he were not thinking about himself at all; as if he might conceivably have become a clergyman even if there had been no such inducement as public appearances in a pulpit.

After service Brat went to Sunday lunch at the Rectory, but not until he had run the gamut of village good wishes. Bee had come out of church at his side ready to pilot him through the ordeal, but she was accosted by Mrs. Gloom, and he was left defenceless. He looked in panic at the first of these unknowns bearing down on him: a big apple-cheeked woman with pink roses in a crinoline hat. How was he going to pretend to remember her? Or all the others who were obviously lingering?

"You remember Sarah Godwin, who used to come on washing days," a voice said, and there was Eleanor at his elbow. She moved him on from one group to another as expertly as a social secretary, briefing him quickly in a muttered phrase as each new face loomed up. "Harry Watts. Used to mend our bicycles." "Miss Marchant. Village school." "Mrs. Stapley. Midwife." "Tommy Fitt. Used to be the gardener's boy." "Mrs. Stack. Rural industries."

She saw him safely to the little iron gate that led into the Rectory garden, opened it, pushed him through, and said: "Now you're safe. That's 'coolee'."

"That's what?"

"Don't tell me you have forgotten that. In our hide-and-seek games a safe hide was always a 'coolee'."

Some day, Brat Farrar, he thought as he walked down the path to the Rectory, you are going to be faced with something that you *couldn't possibly* have forgotten.

At luncheon he and his host sat in relaxed silence while Nancy entertained them, and afterwards he walked in the garden with the Rector and answered his questions about the life he had been leading these last eight years. One of George Peck's charms was that he listened to what was said to him.

On Monday he went to London and sat in a chair while rolls of cloth were exhibited several yards away from him, and were then brought forward to touching distance so that he might gauge the weight, texture, and wearing qualities of the cloth. He was fitted by Gore and Bowen, and measured by Walters, and assured by both that in record time he would have an outfit that no Englishman would blush to own. It was a revelation to him that shirts were made to measure. He had been pleased that he could present himself to the Ashby tailors in a suit as respect-worthy as that made for him by Mr. Sandal's tailor, and it was a shock to him to be sympathised with about the nice clean blue American shirt that he was wearing under it. However, when in Rome.... So he was measured for shirts too.

He lunched with Mr. Sandal, who took him to meet the manager of his bank. He cashed a cheque at the bank, bought a registered envelope, and sent a fat wad of notes to Alec Loding. That had been the arrangement; "notes and no note," Loding had said. No telephones either. There must never be any communication between them again beyond the anonymous notes in the registered envelope.

This first payment to his partner in crime left a taste in his mouth that was not entirely due to the gum on the envelope that he had licked. He went and had a beer to wash it away, but it was still there. So he got on a 24 bus and went to have a look at his late lodgings in Pimlico, and immediately felt better.

He caught the 4.10 down, and Eleanor was waiting in the bug at Guessgate to meet him. His heart was no longer in his mouth, and Eleanor was no longer an abstraction and an enemy.

"It seemed a shame to let you wait for the bus when I was free to come to meet you," she said, and he got in beside her and she drove him home.

"Now you won't have to go away again for a long time," she said.

"No. Except for a fitting, and to the dentist."

"Yes; just up for the day. And perhaps Uncle Charles will expect someone to go up to meet him. But until then we can settle down and be quiet."

So he settled down.

He exercised the horses in the mornings, or schooled them over the jumps in the paddock. He rode out with Eleanor and the

children from Clare Park; and so satisfied Antony Toselli's romantic soul that he arrived for his lesson one morning in a complete "child's riding outfit," to obtain which he had sent telegrams of a length and fluency that made history in the life of the Clare post office. He lunged the yearling for Eleanor, and watched while she taught a young thoroughbred from a racing stable to walk collected and carry his head like a gentleman. Nearly all his days were spent with Eleanor, and when they came in in the evenings it was to plan for to-morrow's task.

Bee watched this companionship with pleasure, but wished that Simon had more share in it. Simon found more and more excuses to be away from home from breakfast to dinner. He would school Timber or Scapa in the morning, and then find some excuse for going into Westover for lunch. Occasionally when he came home for dinner after being out all day Bee wondered whether he was quite sober. But except for the fact that he now took two drinks where once he would have taken one, he drank little at home, and so she decided that she must be mistaken. His alternate fits of moodiness and gaiety were nothing new: Simon had always been mercurial. She took it that his absence was his way of reducing the strain of a difficult situation, and hoped that presently he would make a third in the partnership that was blossoming so happily between Eleanor and Patrick.

"You'll have to do *something* at the Bures Show," Eleanor said one day as they came in tired from the stables. "Otherwise people will think it very odd."

"I could ride in a race, as Ruth suggested."

"But that is just fun. I mean, no one takes that seriously. You ought to show one of the horses. Your own riding things will be here in time, so there's no reason why you shouldn't."

"No.'

"I'm getting to know that monosyllable of yours."

"It's no monopoly of mine."

"No. Just your speciality."

"What could I ride in the races?"

"Well, after Timber, Chevron is the fastest we have."

"But Chevron is Simon's."

"Oh, no. Chevron was bought by Bee with stable money. Have you ridden races at all?"

"Oh, yes. Often. Local ones, of course. For small stakes."

"Well, I think Bee plans to show Chevron as a hack, but that's no reason she shouldn't be entered for the races at the end of the day. She's very nervous and excitable, but she jumps clean and she's very fast."

They put the proposition to Bee at dinner, and Bee agreed to it. "What do you ride at, Brat?"

"Nine stone thirteen."

Bee looked at him reflectively as he ate his dinner. He was too fine-drawn. None of the Ashbys of the last two generations had run to weight, but there was a used-up look about the boy; especially at the end of the day. Presently, when the business of the celebration was all over, they must do something about his leg. Perhaps that accounted for the strung look that marked his spareness. Both physically and psychologically it must be a drag on him. She must ask Peter Spence about a good surgeon to consult.

Bee had been delighted to find that Brat had what Simon so conspicuously lacked: an interest in the genus horse in the abstract. Simon was knowledgeable about breeding in so far as it concerned his own particular interests, but his theoretical study of the matter was confined to *Racing Up to Date*. Brat, on the other hand, took to stud books as some people take to detection. She had gone in one evening to turn off a light that someone had evidently left on in the library, and found Brat poring over a stud book. He was trying to work back on Honey's pedigree, he said.

"You've got the wrong book," she said, and provided him with the right one. She was busy with some W.R.I. matter and so she left him to it and forgot him. But nearly two hours later she noticed the light still there and went in to find Brat surrounded by tomes of all kinds and so dead to the world that he did not hear her come in.

"It's fascinating, Bee," he said. He was mooning over a photograph of Bend Or, and had propped various other volumes open at photographs that gave him particular pleasure, so that the big table looked like some second-hand bookstall with the plates exhibited to entice the purchaser.

"You haven't got my favourite in your collection," she said, having examined his choice, and brought another tome from the shelves. And then, finding that he was totally ignorant, she took him back to the beginning and showed him the foundations-Arab, Barb, and Turk-of the finished product. By midnight there were more books on the floor than there were on the shelves but they had both had a marvellous time.

After that if Brat was missing from the normal orbit, one could always find him in the library, either working out something in a stud book or going slowly through the photographs of remarkable horses.

He sat openly at Gregg's feet, with the result that in a week Gregg was according him a respect that he had never paid to Simon. Bee noticed that where he addressed Simon as "Mr. Simon," Brat was "Mr. Patrick, sir." There was never any trace of the defensive attitude of a stud-groom faced with a newcomer who was also his master. Gregg recognised an enthusiast who did not think that he already knew it all, and so Brat was "Mr. Patrick, sir." Bee would smile as she passed the saddle room and heard the long monotone of Gregg's speech punctuated by Brat's monosyllables.

"Shoot him, I said, I'll do nothing of the kind, that horse'll walk out of here like a Christian inside a month, your blasted hounds can starve, I said, before they get their jaws on as good a piece of horseflesh as ever looked through a bridle, so what do you think I did?" "What?"

Bee was humbly grateful to fate not only for her nephew's return but for the form in which he had returned. Rehearsing in her mind all the shapes that Patrick might have reappeared in, she was filled with wonder that the actual one should be so cut-to-measure, so according to her own prescription. Brat was what she would have indented for if she could have chosen. He was too silent, of course; too reticent. One felt at peace in his company without having any feeling of knowing him. But his unchanging front was surely easier to deal with than Simon's fluidity.

She wrote a long letter to Uncle Charles, to meet him at Marseilles, describing this new nephew to him, and saying all that could not be said in the initial cables. It would not impress Charles, of course, that Brat was useful with horses, since Charles loathed horses; which he held to be animals of an invincible stupidity, uncontrolled imagination, and faulty deduction. Indeed, Charles claimed that a three-months-old child not actually suffering from encephalitis or other congenital incapacity was more capable of drawing a correct deduction than the most intelligent and most impeccably bred thoroughbred. Charles liked cats; and if ever against his better judgement he was lured within smell of a stable, he made friends with the stable cat and retired with it to some quiet corner until the process of horse exhibition was finished. He was rather like a cat himself; a large soft man with a soft round face that creased only sufficiently to hold an eyeglass; in either eye, according to which hand Charles had free at the moment. And although he was over six feet tall, he padded as lightly on his large feet as though he were partly filled with air.

Charles was devoted to his old home and to his family, but was fond of declaring himself a throw-back to a more virile age when a horse was simply a means of transport, capable of carrying a respectable weight, and it was not necessary for a man to develop bones that would disgrace a chicken so that brittle thoroughbreds should be induced to surmount unnecessary and unwarrantable obstacles.

A half-starved cat could out-jump any horse anyhow; and no one had to teach it to, either.

But his brother's grandchildren were the apple of his eye, and he loved every brittle bone of them. And it was to this Charles that Bee commended his new nephew.

"In the short two weeks that he has been here, he has passed from being a complete stranger to being so much part of Latchetts that one doesn't notice him. He has a peculiar trick of being part of the landscape, of course, but it is not just that he is self-effacing. It is that he has dropped into place. I notice that even the country people, to whom he ought still to be strange and a matter for sideways-looking, treat him as if he had been here all along. He is very silent, and rarely volunteers a remark, but his mind is extraordinarily alive, and his comment when he makes one would be blistering sometimes if it were not uttered so gently. He speaks very correct American-which, dear Uncle Charles, is very correct English with a flat A-and drawls a little. It is quite a different drawl from Simon's. I mean, from the drawl Simon uses when he drawls. It is not a comment; just a method of production.

"His greatest conquest was Jane, who resented his coming bitterly, on Simon's behalf. She made a wide sweep round him for days, and then capitulated. Ruth made a tremendous fuss of him, but got little encouragement-I think he felt her disloyalty to Simon-and she is now a little 'off' him.

"George Peck seems pleased with him, but I think finds it hard to forgive his silence all those years. I do too, of course. I find it inexplicable. One can only try to understand the immensity of the upheaval that sent him away from us.

"Simon has been beyond praise. He has taken his relegation to second place with a fortitude and a grace that is touching. I think he is very unhappy, and finds it difficult to join up this new Patrick with the old one. The greatest wrong Pat did in keeping silence was the wrong to Simon. I can only suppose that he intended never to come back at all. I have tried to sound him about it, but he is not an easy person to talk to. He was a reserved child and he is even more reserved to-day. Perhaps he will talk to you when you come.

"We are busy preparing for the Bures Show-which, you will be glad to hear, occurs at least three days before you are even due to arrive in England-and have hopes of a little successful publicity for Latchetts. We have three new horses that are well above average, and we are hoping that at least two of them are of Olympia standard. We shall see what their ring manners are like when we take them to Bures. Patrick has refused to take any part in this year's showings, leaving all the kudos to Simon and Eleanor-to whom, of course, it belongs. I think that, more than anything, describes this Patrick who has come home to us."

Because it was Simon who would show Timber and jump him, Brat left his schooling entirely to him, and shared his attentions between the other horses. But there were days, especially now that Simon absented himself more and more, when someone else had to exercise Timber, and Brat looked forward to those days more than he acknowledged even to himself. He liked most of the Latchetts horses, despised a few, and had an affection for the lively Chevron, the kind, sensible Scapa, and Eleanor's aged hack, Buster: a disillusioned but lovable old gentleman. But Timber was something else again. Timber was challenge, and excitement, and satisfaction; Timber was question and glory.

He planned to cure Timber of brushing people off his back, but he would do nothing yet a while. It was important, if he was going to be jumped at Bures, that nothing should be done to damage his self-confidence. Some day, if Brat had anything to do with it, Timber was going to feel very small indeed, but meanwhile let Simon have at his command every jot of that lordly assurance. So Brat exercised him mildly, and as he rode round the countryside kept his eyes open for a likely curing-place for Timber when the time came. The beeches on Tanbitches had no branches low enough for his purpose, and there was no room on that hill-top to get up the necessary speed. He wanted some open country with isolated or bunched trees with their lowest branches the right height from the ground to tempt Timber to his undoing. He remembered that Timber's most spectacular exploit had been in Lerridge Park and over there was Clare Park, with its surrounding stretch of turf and trees.

"Do the Clare Park people mind if we ride through the park?" he asked Eleanor one day when there was still seven days before the Bures Show.

Eleanor said no, provided they kept away from the playing fields. "They don't play anything because organised games are dreadful unless they are organised by Russians in Russia, but they keep the playing fields because they look well in the prospectus."

So Brat took Timber to the other side of the valley, and cantered him gently on the centuries-old turf of Clare Park, keeping well away from the trees. Then he walked him round the various clumps, gauging the height of the lowest limbs from the ground. The manoeuvre was received by Timber with a puzzled but passionate interest. One could almost see him trying to work it out. What was this for? What did the man come and look at large trees for? With a horse's abnormal memory, he was well aware that large trees were associated with private delights of his own, but, being a horse, he was also incapable of drawing any reasonable deduction from his rider's interest in the same kind of trees.

He walked up to each clump with a mannerly grace, until they approached the large oak which had been for five hundred years the pride of Clare Park. As they came within its flung shadow Timber propped himself suddenly on his forelegs and snorted with fright Brat was puzzled. What did he remember about the oak that would cause a reaction as strong as that? He looked at the ears that were sticking up as stiff as horns. Perhaps it wasn't a memory. Perhaps there was something in the grass.

"Do you always sneak up on girls under trees?" said a voice from the shadows, and from the grass there emerged the seal-like form of Miss Parslow. She propped herself on an elbow and surveyed the pair. Brat was a little surprised that she was alone. "Don't you ever ride anything but that black brute?"

Brat said that he did, quite often.

"I suppose it would be too much to expect that you were looking for me when you came over to the park to ride?"

Brat said that he was looking for a place to teach Timber manners.

"What's the matter with his manners?"

"He has a habit of diving suddenly under a tree so that he scrapes his rider off."

Miss Parslow propped herself a little farther up and looked with new interest at the horse. "You don't say! I never thought the brutes had that much sense. How are you going to stop him?"

"I'm going to make riding under trees a painful experience for him."

"You mean you'll beat him when he tries to do it?"

"Oh, no. That wouldn't do much good."

"After he has actually done it, then?"

"No. He mightn't associate the beating with a tree at all." He rubbed his whip up Timber's dark crest, and Timber bowed. "You'd be surprised at the odd things they associate."

"Nothing would surprise me to any extent about horses. How are you going to do it then?"

"Let him go full bat near a nice tempting tree, and when he swerves under it give him a cut on the belly that he'll remember all his life."

"Oh, no, that's too bad. The poor brute."

"It will be just too bad if I don't time my slip sideways on the saddle properly," Brat said dryly.

"And will that cure him?'

"I hope so. Next time he sees a likely tree he'll remember that it hurt like the blazes last time he tried it."

"But he'll hate you."

Brat smiled. "I'd be very surprised if he associated me with the business at all. I'd be surprised if he even associated it with the whip. Horses don't think like humans."

"What will he think hurt him, then?"

"The tree, more than likely."

"I always thought they were awfully silly animals."

It occurred to Brat that she had not made one of those riding parties on which he had accompanied Eleanor. Nor had he seen her

about the stables lately. He asked how her riding was getting on.

"I've given it up."

"Altogether?"

"Uh-huh."

"But you were getting on well, weren't you? Eleanor said you had learned to bump."

"It was a very slithery bump, and it hurt me far more than it hurt the horse." She pulled a long grass and began to chew it, eyeing him with a sly amusement. "I don't have to hang around the stables any more. If I want to see Simon I know where to find him nowadays."

"Where?" said Brat before he could stop himself.

"The upstairs bar at the Angel."

"In Westover? But are you allowed to go to Westover when you like?"

"I'm attending a Westover dentist." She giggled. "Or rather, I was. The school made the first appointment for me, of course, but after that I just told them when I had to go next. I've reckoned that I have about thirty teeth, which should last me till the end of term quite nicely." She opened her red mouth wide and laughed. They were excellent teeth. "That's what I'm doing at the moment. Putting off time till the Westover bus is due. I could have gone with the earlier one but there is a very good-looking conductor on this one. He's got the length of asking me to the pictures one night next week. If Simon was going on the way he has been all those months, not knowing I'm alive, I'd maybe have done something about the conductor boy-he has lashes about an inch long-but now that Simon has stopped looking down his nose I think I'll give the conductor boy a miss." She chewed the stalk provocatively. "Got quite matey, Simon has."

"Oh."

"Have you been seducing the Gates girl from him, like I suggested?"

"I have not."

"That's funny. He's distinctly off her. And he's not awfully enamoured of you, if it comes to that. So I thought you'd been cutting him out with that Peggy woman. But I suppose it's just that you cut him out of Latchetts."

"You're going to miss your bus, aren't you?"

"You can be just as squashing as Simon, in your own way."

"I was only pointing out that the bus is almost at the smithy. It will be at the Park gates in — "

"What!" she shrieked, exploding to her feet in one enormous convulsion, so that Timber whirled in alarm from the wild eruption. "Oh, great heavens! Oh, for the love of...! Oh! Oh!"

She fled down the park to the avenue gates, screaming her distress as she went. Brat watched the green bus skim along the road past the white gates of Latchetts and slow down as it came to the gates of Clare Park. She was going to catch it after all, and her day would not be wasted. She would find Simon. At the Angel. In the upstairs bar.

That Simon should spend his time in Westover in the Angel bar was distressing but not, in the circumstances, surprising. What was surprising was the emergence of a Simon who was «matey» with Sheila Parslow. In Simon's eyes the Parslow girl had always been something beneath contempt; a lower form of life. He dismissed her with a gibe when her name was mentioned and in her presence was, as she had said herself, unaware that she was alive. What had happened to Simon that he was not only resigned to her companionship, but was «matey»? The girl was not lying about it. If her glowing self-satisfaction was not sufficient evidence, there was the obvious fact that Simon could avoid her by changing his drinking place. There was no lack of pubs in Westover; most of them more exclusively masculine haunts than the very social and female-ridden Angel.

Brat tried to imagine Simon with Sheila Parslow and failed.

What had come over Simon-the fastidious, critical Simon-that he found it possible to endure her? To spend hours in her company? Was it a sort of «laming» his family for the disappointment he had been caused? A sort of you-don't-like-me-therefore-I'll-take-up-

with-Sheila-Parslow? A sorry-when-I'm-dead reaction? There was a very childish side to Simon.

There was also, Brat thought from all he had heard, a very practical side and Sheila Parslow had money, and Simon needed it. But somehow Brat could not believe that Simon, even in his most deplorable moments, would ever consider pawning his life to a nymphomaniacal moron.

As he walked Timber home he considered yet once more the general oddity of Simon, but as usual came to no conclusion.

He handed Timber over to Arthur to be rubbed down, and went down with Eleanor to inspect Regina's new foal.

"She's an old marvel, isn't she," Eleanor said, watching the new arrival stagger about on its out-of-proportion legs. "It's another good one. Not much wonder that she looks complacent. People have been coming to admire her foals for practically a lifetime, the old duchess. I think foals to her are just a means of achieving this annual homage. She doesn't care a rap about the foal."

"It's not any better than Honey's," Brat said, looking at the foal without enthusiasm.

"You and your Honey!"

"And you wait and see what Honey will produce next year with this new mating. A foal that will make history."

"Your enthusiasm for Honey borders on the indecent."

"You heard Bee say that."

"How do you know?"

"I heard her too."

They laughed a little, and she said: "It's so nice to have you here, Brat." He noticed that she did not say: It is so nice to have you back, Patrick; but he realised that she herself was unaware of any oddity in the form she used.

"Is that doctor chap going over to Bures for the show?"

"I shouldn't think so. He's much too busy. What made you think of him?"

Brat did not know.

They pottered round the paddocks for so long that they came in for tea very late, and had it by themselves. Jane was pounding her

way through a Chopin valse with conscientious accuracy, and stopped with undisguised relief when they came in.

"Could I say twenty-five minutes was half an hour, Eleanor?" she asked. "It's twenty-five-and-a-half minutes, really."

"You can say anything you like as long as we don't have to listen to that valse while we eat."

So Jane slid off the piano-stool, removed the glasses that gave her such an owl-like look, pushed them into her breeches pocket, and disappeared thankfully into the out-of-doors.

"Ruth puts in all the tiddley bits and the expression and doesn't mind how many wrong notes she strikes, but with Jane it is accuracy or nothing. I don't know which Chopin would have hated more," Eleanor said, folding bread and butter into a thickness that would match her appetite.

Brat watched her pour the tea with a delight in her clean unhurried movements. Some day the foundation of the life he was living here would give way; Simon would achieve the plan he was devising to undo him, or some incautious word of his own would bring the whole structure crashing down; and then there would be no more Eleanor.

It was not the least of his fears for the future.

They ate in a friendly silence, dropping unrelated remarks into the quiet as they happened to occur to them.

Presently Eleanor said: "Did you ask Bee about colours for the race next week?"

Brat said that he had forgotten.

"Let's go and look them out now. They are in that locker in the saddle room."

So they went back to the stables. The saddle room was empty; Gregg had gone home to his supper; but Eleanor knew where the key was.

"They are practically in ribbons, they are so old," she said as she spread the colours on the table. "They were actually made for Father, and then they were taken in a bit for Simon to wear at point-to-points when he was narrower than he is now. And then let out again when he grew. So they are just hanging together. Perhaps now we'll be able to afford — " She pulled herself up.

"Yes. We'll have a new set."

"I think violet and primrose are nice colours, don't you; but they do fade an unattractive shade. Simon goes blue with cold in the winter, and he says the colours were designed to tone with his face."

They rummaged in the chest, turning up souvenirs of old races. They moved round the saddle room studying the long row of ribbon rosettes, each with its tab under it telling where and how it had been won.

At last Eleanor shut the chest, saying: "It is time we got ready for dinner." She locked the chest and hung up the key. "We'll take the colours with us. I expect they'll fit you all right, since Simon was the last to wear them. But they'll have to be pressed."

She took the colours in her arms, and together they walked out of the saddle-room door and came face to face with Simon.

"Oh, you're back, Simon," Eleanor was beginning, when she caught sight of his face.

"Who had Timber out?" he said, furious.

"I had," Brat said.

"Timber is my business and you have no right to have him out when my back is turned."

"Someone had to exercise him to-day." Brat said mildly.

"*No one* exercises Timber but me. *No one*. If I'm going to be responsible for jumping him, then I say when he is to be exercised, and *I* do the exercising."

"But, Simon," Eleanor said, "that is absurd. There are — "

"Shut up!" he said, through his teeth.

"I will *not* shut up! The horses are Brat's, and if anyone says who does what, and when, then it is — "

"Shut up, I tell you. I won't have a ham-handed lout from the backwoods ruining a good piece of horseflesh like Timber."

"Simon! Really!"

"Coming from nowhere and interfering in the stables as if he had lived here all his life!"

"You must be drunk, Simon, to talk like that about your own brother."

"My brother! *That!* Why, you poor little fool, he isn't even an Ashby. God knows what he is. Somebody's groom, I have no doubt. And that is what he should be doing. Sweeping out stables. Not lording it round the countryside on my best horses. After this, you damned little upstart, you leave the horses I intend to ride in their stable unless I say they are to be taken out, and if I say they are to be taken out it is not you who will ride them. We have plenty of other stablemen."

His chin was sticking out about two feet from Brat's face, and Brat could have brought one from the ground that would have lifted him half over the saddle room. He longed to do it, but not with Eleanor there. And not now, perhaps. Better not do anything that he could not foresee the consequences of.

"Well? Did you hear me?" shouted Simon, maddened by his silence.

"I heard you," Brat said.

"Well, see that you remember what I said. Timber is my business, and you don't put a leg across him again until I say so."

And he flung away from them towards the house.

Eleanor looked stricken.

"Oh, Brat, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. He had that mad notion about your not being Patrick before he ever saw you, and now that he has been drinking I suppose it came from the back of his mind and he said it because he was angry. He always did say a lot of things he didn't mean when he was in a temper, you know."

It was Brat's experience that, on the contrary, it was only when a person was in a temper that they said exactly what they did mean. But he refrained from telling Eleanor that.

"He *has* been drinking, you know," she went on. "I know he doesn't look as if he has, but I can tell from his eyes. And he would never have behaved like that when he was sober, even in a temper. I do apologise for him."

Brat said that everyone made a fool of themselves some time or other when they had "drink taken," and she was not to bother about

They followed Simon to the house soberly, the happiness of their long afternoon together vanished as if it had not been.

As he changed into what he still thought of as "his good suit" Brat thought that if the cracks that were showing in Simon widened sufficiently he might one day show his hand, and he would find out what Simon's plans for him were. He wondered if Simon would be sober enough to behave normally at dinner.

But there was no Simon at dinner, and when Eleanor asked where he was, Bee said that he had gone over to the pub at Guessgate to meet a friend who was staying there. Someone had telephoned just before dinner, it appeared.

Bee looked equable, and Brat decided that Simon had seemed normal to her and that she had believed his story of the friend staying the night at the Guessgate inn.

And in the morning Simon came down to breakfast his usual sunny self.

"I'm afraid I was tight last night," he said. "And very objectionable, I'm afraid. I apologise unreservedly."

He regarded Brat and Eleanor, the only other people at the table, with friendly confidence. "I ought never to drink gin," he said. "It obscures the judgement and destroys the soul."

"You were quite horrible," Eleanor said coldly.

But the atmosphere cleared, and the day was just another day. Bee came in from out-of-doors for her second cup of coffee; Jane arrived clutching to her stomach the bowl of porridge which she had fetched from the kitchen for herself, according to Latchetts routine; Ruth came flying in very late with a «diamond» clasp in her hair and was sent back to take the thing off.

"Where did she get that loathsome object," Bee said, when Ruth had disappeared with wild cries that Bee was going to make her late for lessons.

"She bought it at Woolworth's last time we were in Westover," Jane said. "They're not real diamonds, you know, but it seemed a bargain for one-and-sixpence."

"Why didn't you buy one then, Jane?" Bee asked, looking at the aged kirby-grip that kept Jane's hair off her face.

"Oh, I don't think I'm the diamond type," Jane said.

So the Ashby household settled back to its normal placidity, and to its preparations for that day at Bures that was to alter all their lives

Bures was a little market town, set north of Westover and almost in the middle of the county. It was like almost every other little market town in the south of England, except perhaps that it stood in slightly richer and more unspoiled country than most. For which reason the Bures Agricultural Show, although a small country affair, had a standing and reputation considerably greater than its size alone would warrant. Every year animals would appear at the Bures Show on their way to more mature triumphs elsewhere, and it was common for someone, watching an exhibit at one of the great shows, to say: "I remember that when it was a novice at Bures three years ago."

It was a pleasant, civilised little town, with a minister, some fine old inns, a High Street both broad and gay, and no self-consciousness whatsoever. The farmers who brought their wares to its markets would have annoyed Mr. Macallan exceedingly by their content with their lot, and their evident unawareness that there were other worlds to conquer. An air of well-being came off the Bures pavements like reflected sunlight. Bad years there might be, for both tradespeople and farmers, but that was a risk that was incidental in a life that was satisfying and good.

The annual show, in the early summer, was a social reunion as well as a business affair, and the day ended with a "ball" in the assembly room of the Chequers, at which farmers' wives who hadn't seen each other since New Year swopped gossip, and young blades who had not met since the Combined Hunts Ball swopped horses. The combined hunts, between them, embraced the town; the Lerridge to the south and the Kenley Vale to the north; and did much to ensure that the horses exhibited at Bures should be worth more than a passing glance. And since almost every farmer well enough off to own both a horse and a tractor belonged to one or other of the hunts, there was never any lack of competition.

In the early days of the show, when transport was still by horse and slow, it was the custom to stay overnight at Bures; and the Chequers, the Rose and Crown, the Wellington, and the Kenley Arms packed them in three to a bed. But with the coming of the motor all that changed. It was more fun to go home nine-to-a-car in the summer dawn than to sleep three-to-a-bed in the Wellington. It was not always a successful method of getting home, of course, and more than one young farmer had spent his summer months in hospital after the Bures Show, but to the younger generation it was inconceivable that they should sleep in an inn when their home was less than forty miles away. So only the older exhibitors, who clung to tradition, or those who lived at an inconvenient distance from Bures, or could not, owing to difficult communications, get their animals away on the evening of the show, still stayed overnight at Bures. And of these most stayed at the Chequers.

The Ashbys had had the same bedrooms at the Chequers for the night of the Bures Show since the days of William Ashby the Seventh: he who had joined the Westover Fencibles to resist the expected invasion of Napoleon the First. They were not the best bedrooms, because in those days the best bedrooms went to the Ledinghams of Clare, who also, of course, had a yearly reservation for the night of the show. What the Ledinghams left went to the Shirleys of Penbury and the Hallands of Hallands House. The Hallands, on whose lands on the outskirts of the town the show was held, had used the bedrooms only for their overflow of guests, but a Hallands guest rated a great deal higher, of course, than any Ashby in the flesh.

Penbury was now the possession of the nation in the shape of the National Trust; a shillingsworth of uplift for coachloads who didn't know Gibbons from Adam and wanted their tea. Hallands House was also the possession of the nation, in the shape of a Government department. No one quite knew what this alien community did. Mrs. Thrale, who ran the Singing Kettle tea-rooms out on the Westover road, once boldly asked a young Government employee who was drinking her coffee what her task was at the moment, and was told that it was "arranging the translation of *Tom Jones* into Turkish"; but this was held to be merely a misunderstanding on Mrs. Thrale's part, and no one had the heart to question the aliens further. They kept themselves to themselves very determinedly, and it was no longer possible for the people of Bures to walk through Hallands Park.

It would have been possible long ago for the Ashbys on their annual visit to have some of the finer bedrooms at the Chequers, but no such idea ever crossed an Ashby mind. The difference between Number 3 and Number 17 was not that one was a fine room with a pleasant outlook and good furniture and the other a back room looking on to the roof of the assembly room, but that one wasn't «their» room and the other was. So they still had the three little rooms in the older wing, which, since the bathroom had been added at the end of the passage, made it practically an Ashby apartment.

Gregg took the horses over to Bures on Tuesday evening. Arthur followed on Wednesday morning with the ponies and Eleanor's hack, Buster, who hated any box but his own, and was liable to kick a strange stable to pieces. Simon and the twins went in the car with Bee; and Brat shared the bug with Eleanor and Tony Toselli, who had insisted on being allowed to compete in the Best Child Rider class. ("My father will commit suicide if I am not allowed to try.")

Brat wished that this tadpole creature was not sitting between himself and Eleanor. The feeling that his time with Eleanor was short was constantly with him, making each indifferent moment a matter of consequence. But Eleanor seemed happy enough to feel charitable even to Tony Toselli.

"It's going to be perfect weather," she said, looking at the high arch of the sky with no cloud in it. "I can remember only one real soaker at Bures and that's years ago. They've always been awfully lucky. Did I put my string gloves in the locker?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do all the morning? Look at Mrs. Godwin's jam exhibit?"

"I'm going to walk the course."

"Canny Brat," she said, approving. "How right you are."

"The other fellows probably know every inch of it."

"Oh, yes. For most of them it is an annual. In fact, if you started the horses off they'd probably go round by themselves, they are so

used to it. Did Bee remember to give you your stand ticket?"

"Yes."

"And have you got it with you?"

"I have."

"I sound a fusser this morning, don't I? You are a nice reassuring person to be with. Do you never get excited, Brat?"

"Oh, yes."

"Inside-churning excited?"

"Inside turning over and over."

"That's interesting. It just doesn't show, I suppose."

"I suppose not."

"It's an extraordinarily useful sort of face to have. Mine goes a dull unhealthy pink, as you can see."

He thought the warm childish flush on her normally cool features touching and endearing.

"I hear that Peggy Gates has a new outfit for the occasion. Have you ever seen her on a horse? I can't remember."

"No.

"She looks nice," Eleanor said approvingly. "She rides very well. I think she will do justice to that horse of Dick Pope's."

It was typical of Eleanor that her judgement was independent of her emotions.

The High Street of Bures glittered in the low morning sunlight. Large Motoring Association signs encouraged the traveller, and fluttering advertisements cajoled him. "Carr's Meal for Calves," said a banner. "Saffo, the Safe Disinfectant!" screamed a chimney-to-chimney pendant. "Pett's Dip," said a placard quietly, taking it for granted that the Dip was sufficiently famous to explain itself.

In the dim hall of the Chequers Bee was waiting for them. Simon had gone round to the stables, she said.

"The rooms are Numbers 17, 18, and 19, Brat. You are sharing 17 with Simon, Nell and I have 18, and the twins are in the connecting one, 19."

Sharing a room with Simon was something he had not reckoned with, but there was nothing he could do about it. He picked up Eleanor's bag and his own and went upstairs with them, since the hall was a flurry of arriving guests. Eleanor came with him and showed him where the rooms were.

"The first time I came here and was allowed to stay the night I thought life had nothing left to offer," she said. "Put it down there, Brat, thank you, and I'll unpack it at once or my frock will be ruined."

In Number 17 Simon's things were already strewn all over the room, including the second bed. It was odd how these inanimate belongings of Simon's had, even in his absence, a kind of arrogance.

Brat cleared his own bed and unpacked, hanging his new evening things carefully in the still empty wardrobe. To-night for the first time in his life he would wear evening clothes.

"In case you get lost, Brat," Bee said to him when he came down, "lunch is at twelve-thirty in the luncheon tent. The last table to your left as you come in. What do you plan to do this morning? Poke the pigs?"

"No, he is going to walk the course," Eleanor said.

"All right. Don't stray off it into any Government holy-of-holies and get yourself arrested, will you?"

Tony was handed over to Mrs. Stack, who, being interested solely in rural industries, represented a Fixed Point in the flux of an agricultural show.

"If he tells you that his father is dying and he is urgently wanted at home, don't believe him," Eleanor said.

"Is his father ill, then?"

"No, but Tony may grow bored before half-past twelve. I'll come and fetch him for lunch."

Brat walked into the High Street of Bures with a feeling of escape. For the first time for nearly a month he was his own master, free to be himself. He had forgotten what it was like to walk about without care. For nearly three hours he could go where he liked, ask what he wanted, and answer without a curb on his tongue.

"Hallands Park," said the direction sign on a bus, so he got on the bus and went there. He had never been to a country show before, and he went round the exhibits with an interest that was at once fresh and critical, comparing all he saw with similar things seen elsewhere. Homespuns in Arizona, farm implements in Normandy, rams in Zacatecas, Herefords after American air, pottery in New Mexico. Occasionally someone looked at him curiously, and more than one hand was half lifted in salutation only to fall again. He was too like an Ashby ever to be completely free in Bures. But, speaking generally, people were too absorbed in the exhibits and in their own cares at that hour of the morning to take much interest in the passer-by.

Having exhausted the exhibition, he walked out into the park, where the red flags marked out the temporary race-course. It was a straight, fast-galloping course over hurdles for the first half-mile through the park, then it went out into the country in a wide curve of a mile or more, came back to the park about half a mile from the stands, and from then on was another series of hurdles up to the finish in front of the stands. Except for the sharp turns and a few very blind fences in the country, it was not a difficult course. The hurdles in the park stretches were regulation racing ones, and the turf was wonderful. Brat's heart lifted.

It was very peaceful out there in the country, and he came back to the show with a sense of reluctance. But he was surprised to find how glad he was to see the familiar faces round the table in the luncheon tent when he got there; how glad he was to sink into the place kept for him, and be part of this family again.

People came up to their table to welcome him back to Bures Show, to England. People who had known Bill and Nora Ashby, and Bill's father before him. None of them expected him to remember them, and he had merely to be polite.

"I think I'm going to be sick," Ruth said, when she and Brat were left alone in the stand.

"I don't wonder," said Brat.

"Why?" she was surprised into saying, this being not at all the reaction she expected.

"Three ices on top of dressed crab."

"It is not anything I *ate*," she said, repressive. "It's that I have a delicate nervous system. Excitement makes me feel ill. I get sick with it."

"I should go and get it over," Brat advised.

"Be sick, you mean!"

"Yes. It's a wonderful feeling."

"If I sit very still I may feel better," Ruth said, giving up.

Ruth was feeling her lack of importance to-day. She avoided horses too consistently for the rest of the year to claim any right to exhibit any on this one day at Bures, so she sat in the stand in her neat grey flannel and looked on. It was to her credit that she did not grudge her twin her well-earned place in the sun, and was passionately anxious that Jane should come first in her class.

"There's Roger Clint with Eleanor."

Brat looked for the couple and found them.

"Who is Roger Clint?"

"He has a big farm near here."

Roger Clint was a black-browed young man, and he was being old-friendly with Eleanor.

"He's in love with Eleanor," said Ruth, having failed with one try for drama.

"A very good person to be in love with," Brat said, but his heart contracted.

"It would be a very good thing if she married him. He has lots of money and a lovely big house and simply scads of horses."

Against his will Brat asked if Eleanor were thinking of it.

Ruth considered the pros and cons or this as they fitted into her dramatic framework.

"She is making him serve his seven years for her. You know: like Jacob. He is simply frantic about it, poor Roger, but she is La Belle Dame Sans Merci."

La Belle Dame Sans Merci bade Mr. Clint a temporary farewell and came up to join them in the stands as the Novices under Ten filed into the ring.

"Do you know that Tony scraped into this by the skin of his teeth," she said, sitting down by Brat. "He is going to be ten the day after to-morrow."

There were eleven novices, the youngest being a fat child of four in a black velvet jockey cap, who bounced about on a solid pony of which she had no control whatever.

"Well, at least Tony never looked as awful as that, even in his bad days," Eleanor said.

"Tony looks wonderful," Ruth said, and Tony did indeed look wonderful. As Eleanor had said on an earlier occasion, Tony had the root of the matter in him.

The novices walked, and trotted, and cantered, under the lenient eye of the judges, and presently the seeding began. Even from the stand the fanatic determination in Tony's snail-black eyes was plain to see. He was going to be in the money or die in the attempt. From being six possibles they were narrowed down to four, but these four kept the judges puzzled. Again and again they were sent out to canter and brought back for inspection, and sent out to canter again. There were only three prizes and one must go.

It was at this stage that Tony played what he evidently considered his ace. As he cantered along in front of the stand he got to his knees in the saddle and with a slight scramble stood up in it, straight and proud.

"Oh, God," said Eleanor reverently and with feeling.

A ripple of laughter went through the stand. But Tony had another shot in his locker. He slipped to his knees, grabbed the front edge of the saddle, and stood on his head, his thin spider-legs waving rather uncertainly in the air.

At that a gale of laughter and applause broke out, and Tony, much gratified, resumed his seat and urged his astonished pony, who had slowed to a trot, into a canter again.

That of course settled the matter very nicely for the judges, and Tony had the mortification of seeing the three rosettes handed to his rivals. But his mortification was nothing to the mortification he had already inflicted on his preceptress.

"I hope I don't see that child until I cool off," she said, "or I am liable to take an axe to him."

But Tony, having handed his pony over to Arthur, came blithely to the stands to find her.

"Tony, you little *idiot*," she said, "what made you do a thing like that?"

"I wanted to show how I could ride, Eleanor."

"And where did you learn to do those circus tricks?"

"I practised on the pony that mows the lawn. At school, you know. He has a much broader back than Muffet, and that's why I wasn't so steady to-day. I don't think these people appreciate good riding," he added, nodding his head at the offending judges.

Eleanor was speechless.

Brat presented him with a coin and told him to go and buy himself an ice.

"If I didn't want to see Jane ride," Eleanor said, "I would go and bury my shame in the ladies' room. I'm curdled with humiliation."

Jane, on Rajah, in her best riding things, was a pleasant sight. Brat had never seen her in anything but the shabby jodhpurs and

shapeless jersey that she wore at home, and was surprised by this trim little figure.

"Jane has the best seat of all the Ashbys," Eleanor said affectionately, watching the serious and efficient Jane making Rajah change his leg to order. "That is her only rival: that tall girl on the grey."

The tall girl was fifteen and the grey very handsome, but the judges preferred Jane and Rajah. Jane might have lost for all the emotion she showed, but Ruth was rapturous.

"Good old Jane," Simon said, appearing beside them. "A veteran at nine."

"Oh, Simon, did you see!" Eleanor said, in agony again as she remembered.

"Cheer up, Nell," he said, dropping a commiserating hand on her shoulder. "It might have been worse."

"How could it be worse?"

"He didn't yodel," Simon said.

At that she began to laugh, and went on laughing. "Oh, I suppose it is very funny," she said, wiping her eyes, "and I expect I shall laugh over it for years, but at the moment I just wish I could be in Australia for the rest of the afternoon."

"Come on, Nell," he said. "It's time to collect the horses," and they went away together as Jane came to sit in the stand.

"This is the exciting class coming now. It isn't very much to win a Fifteen and Under," was her answer to Brat's congratulations. "Some day I'll be down there with *them*. With Aunt Bee, and Eleanor, and Simon, and Peggy, and Roger Clint, and all of them."

Yes, there was Roger Clint. Eleanor was riding the long-backed bay mare Scapa, and Roger Clint was standing next to her on a chestnut with four of the longest and whitest stockings Brat had ever seen. While the judges walked down the row he and Eleanor talked quietly together.

"Who do you think will be first?" Jane asked.

Brat took his eyes from Eleanor and Clint and forced himself to consider the entry. The judge had sent Bee out to canter Chevron, the chestnut he was going to race this afternoon, and she was coming down in front of the stands now. He had never seen Bee in formal riding clothes, and was surprised again, as he had been with Jane. It was a new, serious, rather intimidating Bee.

"Who do you think, Brat?" Jane said again.

"Timber, of course."

"Not Peggy's horse? The one Dick Pope had?"

"Riding Light? No. He may win the jumping, but not this."

And he was right. This was the judges' first sight of Timber and they were too much impressed to be seduced even by the looks and reputation of Riding Light.

And it was a popular verdict. As Simon cantered Timber down in front of the stands after accepting the rosette the applause broke into cheering.

"Isn't that the brute that killed old Felix?" a voice behind said. "They ought to shoot it instead of giving it prizes."

Second was Peggy on Riding Light, looking flushed and pleased; her father's extravagance had been justified. Third, rather unexpectedly, was Bee on Chevron.

"The Ashbys cleaning up as usual," the voice said, and was instantly shushed, and the proximity of the Ashbys presumably indicated.

It was when the Open Jumping Class began that the real excitement of the day was reached, and Bee came to sit in the stand and share it with them.

"Number One, please," said the loud-speaker, and Eleanor came into the ring on Scapa. Scapa was a careful and unemotional jumper, but could never be persuaded into standing away from her fences. By dint of patient schooling with a guard rail, Eleanor hoped that she had now persuaded her into better ways. And for half a round it worked, until Scapa noticed that there was no plaguey obstruction to beware of at the foot of these jumps, and began to go close in again, with the inevitable result. Nothing Eleanor could do would make her take off in time. She jumped "fit to hit the moon," but came down in the wrong place, and the little battens of white-painted wood came down with her.

"Poor Nell," said Bee. "After all her schooling."

Number Two and Number Three did not appear to have been schooled at all.

"Number Four, please," said the loud-speaker, and Riding Light appeared. Peggy's "new outfit" consisted of a dark snuff-coloured coat a little too tight in the waist, and a pair of buff breeches a little too pale in the buff, but she looked well on the brown horse and handled him beautifully. Or rather, she sat still and let Riding Light do his stuff. He was a finished jumper who took the obstacles in his stride, propelling himself into the air in a long effortless curve and tucking his hind feet after him like a cat. He went out having done a perfect round.

"Number Five, please," said the loud-speaker.

Number Five was Roger Clint's mount with the long white stockings. "Do you know what he calls it?" Bee said. "Operation Stockings."

"It's very ugly," Brat said. "Looks as if he had walked through a trough of whitewash."

"He can jump, though."

He could certainly jump, but he had phobia about water.

"Poor Roger," laughed Bee, watching Stockings refuse the water. "He has been jumping him backwards and forwards across the duck pond at home in the hope of curing him, and now he does this!"

Stockings continued to refuse, and Clint had to take him out, in a burst of sympathetic applause.

Numbers Six and Seven had one fault each.

Number Eight was Simon on Timber.

The black horse came into the ring exactly as he had come out of his box on the day Brat first saw him, pleased with himself and ready for homage. His excited, flickering ears pricked into attention as he caught sight of the jumps. Simon took him into a canter and moved down to the first one. Even from where he was sitting, Brat could feel the smoothness of that action. The smoothness that had

astonished him that first day at Latchetts when he had ridden on the top of the down. Smoothly the black horse rose into the air and came down on the far side of the jump, and a murmur of admiration came from the crowd at the almost feline beauty of it. Brat, with the most wholehearted respect, watched Simon's body swing with the black horse's rise and fall as though he were part of it. It was right that Simon should ride it. He would never attain that perfection if he lived to be a hundred. A great silence settled on the crowd as one by one the jumps fled away behind Timber. It would be monstrous if this beauty were to fail or be faulted. It was so quiet when he faced the water jump that the voice of a paper-seller far away at the main gate was the only sound to be heard. And when he landed smoothly and neatly on the far bank, a great sigh went up from them. They had seen a perfect thing. They had not been cheated of it after all.

So moved were they that Simon was almost out of the ring before the applause broke out.

The last three entries had been scratched, and Simon was the final performer, so the second round began as soon as he had left.

Eleanor came back on Scapa, and by dint of voice and spur managed to make the unwilling mare take off at the proper place, and so did something to retrieve her self-respect. The crowd, appreciating what had been wrong in the first place and what she had now succeeded in doing, gave her credit for it.

Number Two did a wild but lucky round, and Number Three a wild and unlucky one; and then came Peggy again, still flushed from the pleasure of her perfect round.

Again she had the sense to sit still while Riding Light heaved her into the air with the thrust of his tremendous quarters, sailed over the jump, and made for the next one with his ears erect and confident. It seemed that there was nothing to hinder the brown horse doing this all day. There was an air of routine about the business that somehow detracted from his performance; he made it look too easy. There seemed little doubt that he would do another perfect round. His judgement of distance was faultless. He never had to stop and put in a short one to bring him to the proper taking-off point; he arrived at the taking-off point by some computing of his own, taking the jumps in his stride as if they were hurdles. He was coming up to the wall now, and they waited to see if he would treat that, too, like a hurdle.

"Thump! Thump!" said the drum of the Bures Silver Band, as the preliminary to *Colonel Bogey* and their entry into the front gate of the show for their afternoon performance. Riding Light's ears flickered in question, in doubt. His mind was distracted from that rapidly nearing wall. His ears shot forward again in alarm as he saw it almost upon him. He shortened his stride, trying to fit it into the remaining space, but he had misjudged it. He rose at it with determination and landed on the other side, flinging his quarters upwards in a successful effort to avoid hitting the fence that was now too close under him. But the shoe of his near fore had touched the wall as he rose to it, and a billet slid out of place, wavered a moment on the edge, and then dropped to the ground.

"A-a-ah!" said the crowd in quick sympathy, and Peggy looked back to see what had happened. She saw the little gap in the top of the wall, but it did not rattle her. She collected Riding Light, patted him encouragingly on the neck, and headed him for the next.

"Good girl, Peggy!" murmured Bee.

The distant band was now playing *Colonel Bogey*, and Riding Light took no further notice of it; he knew all about bands. Bands had been the accompaniment to some of his best performances. He settled down again to his routine, and finished by taking the water jump with a margin that made the crowd gasp.

"Simon will never beat that," Bee said. "That perfect round of Timber's was a miracle in the first place."

The four long stockings of Roger Clint's mount flashed round the ring in a brisk and willing fashion until they came to the water. Faced with the long distance to the last jump, Stockings stopped and pondered. Clint argued amiably with him, but Stockings would have none of it. "I know what is behind that hedge quite well, and I *don't like* it!" he seemed to be saying. And then, with that perennial unreasonableness of horses, he decided to have a go at it. Of his own accord he turned towards the jump and began to canter. Roger sat down and drove him at it, and Stockings went flying down to it with purpose in every line of him. In the last half-second he changed his mind just as suddenly as he had made it up, stuck both toes in hard, and skidded to a stop up against the fence.

The crowd laughed, and so did Roger Clint. He hauled himself back into the saddle from his position round his mount's neck. He took Stockings round to the other side of the fence and showed him the water. He took him up to it and let him inspect it at close quarters. He walked him round it and let him look at the other edge. And then he took him back to the far end of the ring and turned him to the jump. With an air of "Oh, well, let's get this thing over with" Stockings jumped off his haunches, tore down the ring, and fled over the water with a yard or two to spare.

The crowd laughed delightedly, and the white teeth showed in Clint's brown face. He lifted his hat to the applause without looking at them, as a cricketer lifts his cap, and rode out of the ring, well satisfied to have ignored the judge's disqualifying eye long enough to have induced Stockings to cross the hated obstacle.

Number Six had two faults. Number Seven two-and-a-half.

"Number Eight, please," said the loud-speaker, and Jane shivered and put her hand in Bee's. For once Ruth did not have to manufacture drama to suit her; her mouth was open with suspense and she was entirely oblivious of Ruth Ashby.

Timber had neither the experience nor the machine-like power of Riding Light. He had to be ridden. It rested as much on Simon's judgement as on Timber's powers whether they could beat the almost faultless performance of Peggy Gates's horse. Brat thought that Simon looked very white about the mouth. There was more in this for Simon than winning a cup at a small country show. He had to take that prize from the girl who had tried to be upsides with him by introducing a made winner to beat his own untried horses.

Timber came in looking puzzled. It was as if he said: "I've *done* this." His ears pricked at the sight of the jumps and then flickered in question. There was no eagerness to go at them as there had been when it was a new experience. But he went good-manneredly down to the first and cleared it in his effortless fluid fashion. Brat thought that he could hear the Ashby hearts thumping alongside him. He could certainly hear his own; it was making a noise like the Bures Silver Band's drum. Simon was half-way round. Ruth had shut her mouth and her eyes and looked as if she were praying. She opened her eyes in time to see Timber clear the gate; a smooth river of black pouring over the white barrier. "Oh, thank you, God," said Ruth. There was only the wall and the water left.

As Timber turned at the far end of the ring to come back to the wall a gust of wind lifted Simon's hat from his head and sent it bowling along the ground behind him. Brat was of the opinion that Simon was not even aware of it. Not even Tony Toselli had shown a

concentration like Simon's. For Simon there quite patently existed nothing in this world but himself, the black horse, and the jumps. No one, *no one*, was going to come between Simon Ashby and the sun and get away with it.

Everything that Simon knew of riding, everything he had learned since he first sat on a pony at the age of two, was devoted to getting Timber safely over the wall. Timber did not like hard bare obstacles.

He had started his canter to the wall when a shrieking white terrier shot out from the stand in pursuit of the distant hat, streaking across in front of the advancing Timber like a hard-kicked ball, and yelling its excitement as only a terrier can.

Timber swerved from this terror and broke into a sweat.

Ruth shut her eyes again and resorted to further prayer. Simon soothed Timber patiently, cantering him round and making much of him while someone retrieved the dog and brought it back to its owner. (Who said: "Poor darling Scottie, he might have been killed!") Patiently, while the unforgiving seconds ticked on, Simon worked to reassure Timber. He must know that time was running out, that the dog incident was now officially over and each additional second's delay piling up against him.

Brat had marvelled often at Simon's powers of self-control, but he had never seen a more remarkable sample of it. The temptation to take Timber to the jump as he was must be enormous. But Simon was taking no chances with Timber. He was pawning time to gain a little better odds for Timber.

And then, having apparently calculated his time to the nearest possible margin, he brought Timber, still sweating but collected, to the wall again. Just before he came to the fence Timber hesitated a little.

And Simon sat still.

If it had been possible for Brat to like Simon Ashby he would have liked him at that moment.

The horse, undistracted from the task in front of him, gathered himself together and catapulted himself over the hated obstacle. And then, relieved to have it behind him, he raced on delightedly to the water and rocketed across it like a blackbird.

Simon had done it.

Jane took her hand out of Bee's, and wiped her palms on a screwed-up ball of handkerchief.

Bee slipped her arm through Brat's and squeezed it.

The great burst of cheering made speech inaudible.

In the quiet that succeeded it Ruth said, as one remembering an awkward engagement: "Oh, dear! I've pawned my month's allowance."

"To whom?" asked her aunt.

"God," said Ruth.

Brat surveyed himself in the small cracked mirror of the Gent's Temporary Dressing-room and decided that primrose and violet did not become him any better than they became Simon. It would take Roger Clint's dark face to do justice to those springtime glories. Roger Clint would probably look dashing in them. He was in no mood to look favourably on Roger Clint. Whenever he had caught sight of Eleanor this afternoon it seemed that she was in the company of Mr. Clint, and what is more, seemed to be enjoying the company.

Brat tugged the yellow visor a little farther over his eyes. A sick misery burned in him; a spiritual heartburn.

"What's it got to do with you?" said a voice in him. "You're her brother: remember?"

"Shut up!"

"Can't have your cake and eat it, you know."

"Shut up!"

He walked out of the almost deserted dressing-room and went to find Chevron. The serious business of the day was over and there was an air of relaxation. In the shade of the trees competitors who had taken part in the sober events were now walking ponies and coffeehousing while they waited for the bending race. Alone for the moment, on a solid dun pony, was Peggy Gates, her eyes roving over the crowd in search of someone. She looked tired and discouraged. As Brat came level with her he paused and said:

"That was very bad luck."

"Oh, hullo, Mr. Ashby! What was?"

"The big drum."

"Oh, that!" she said, and smiled at him. "Oh, that was just one of those things."

She sounded quite philosophical about it, and yet Brat could have sworn that when he came up she had tears in her eyes.

"Good luck to the race," she said.

Brat thanked her and was moving away when she said: "Mr. Ashby, have I done anything to offend Simon, do you know?" Brat said no, not that he knew.

"Oh. It's just that he seems to be avoiding me lately, and I'm not aware of having done anything-anything that he wouldn't — "
There were undoubted tears in her eyes now.

"Oh, you *know*," she said, tried a smile, didn't manage it very well, and moved away with a wave of her hand.

So it had not been a desire to be mistress of Latchetts that had moved pretty Peggy; it was devotion to Simon. Poor Peggy. Simon would never forgive her for Riding Light.

Eleanor was waiting under the trees on Buster, but stirrup to stirrup with her was Roger Clint, who had also found a pony for the bending race. Roger was pouring out a long story and Eleanor was nodding sympathetically; Brat gave them a wide berth and betook himself to the stables. In the stables he found Bee and Gregg. Gregg saw him weighed out and saddled Chevron, who was nervous and unhappy.

"It's the sound of the crowd that worries her," Gregg said. "Something she hears and can't understand. If I were you, Mr. Patrick, sir, I'd take her out and walk her. Take her out and show her the crowds and she'll be so interested she'll forget her nerves."

So Brat took the dithering chestnut out into the park, and she became gradually quieter, as Gregg had known she would. Presently Simon found him and suggested that it was time to be going down to the start.

"Did you remember to sign the book?" he asked.

"Book?" said Brat. "Sign for what?"

"To show that you consent to your horse running."

"I never heard of anyone signing a book. The horse was entered, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but in previous years they had trouble with gate-crashers. Some bright sparks who took out horses that didn't belong to them, when their owners didn't intend to run them. Had a free jaunt on them, and in at least one case broke the already tired horse down."

"All right. Where is the book?"

"In the weighing-room place. I'll look after Chevron till you come back. No need to take her into that melee."

In the little office, sitting behind the desk, was Colonel Smollett.

"Well, young Ashby, your family has been doing very well to-day, eh? Three firsts, no less. Are you going to add a fourth? Book? What book? Oh, the paper. Yes, yes. Here it is."

Brat, signing the single sheet of paper that was presented to him, said that he had never heard of this procedure.

"Probably not. Never heard of it myself. But it does insure the show against loss to a certain extent. That fellow whose horse was ridden unbeknownst to him last year, he sued the Show for damages. Very nearly got them, too. So your brother suggested this method of insurance."

"My brother? Simon suggested it?"

"Yes. Got a head on him, Simon. Now no one can say that his horse was pulled out without his permission."

"I see."

He went back and retrieved Chevron from Arthur's custody.

"Mr. Simon said he couldn't wait, Mr. Patrick, but he said to wish you luck. He's gone back to the stands with the rest of the family to watch the finish."

"All right, Arthur; thanks."

"Would you like me to come to the start with you, sir?"

"Oh, no, thanks."

"In that case, I'll go and see about getting myself a place to see from. Good luck, sir. We're betting on you."

And he hurried off through the crowd.

Brat put the reins over Chevron's head and was just about to mount when he thought that he would take one more look at the girth. He had already tightened it, but perhaps he had made it too tight.

But someone had loosened the girth.

Brat stood holding up the flap with his hand and stared. Someone had loosened it since he left the mare with Simon. He put his hand under the girth and tested its degree of slackness. He reckoned that it would have got him out of the park into the country and would have lasted perhaps another two fences. After that, the saddle would have slipped round on the highly excitable Chevron and she would have gone crazy.

Arthur? No, not Arthur. Simon almost certainly.

He tightened the girth and made for the start. As he arrived he was overtaken by Roger Clint in white and scarlet on Operation Stockings.

"You're Patrick Ashby, aren't you?" he said. "My name is Roger Clint." He leaned over and shook hands. "Very nice to have you at Bures again."

"Who won the bending race?" Brat asked.

"I did. By a short head from Nell."

"Nell" indeed!

"She won it last year on Buster, so it is just as well that the thing should go round. And I wanted a silver cup, anyway."

Brat had no time to ask why he had this longing for a silver cup. They were lining up, and he was Number Five, and Roger Clint was away on the outside. There were fourteen runners and a considerable amount of jostling. There was no gate, of course, the start being by flag.

Brat was in no hurry at the start. He let the others lead him so that he could gauge the opposition. At least five, he decided, were horses that had been ridden so much to-day that they were of no consequence and were merely cluttering up the course and spoiling things for their betters. Three more he had seen jumped in a junior competition, and had no belief that they would ever get round the course. That left five possibles, and of these three were dangerous: a bay charger ridden by his officer owner; a great raking brown youngster ridden by a young farmer; and Roger Clint's mount.

They took the hurdles at a tearing pace, and two of the overworked lot, fighting for position, struck into each other and rolled into a third. One of the «junior» jumpers came a frightful purler over the first fence going into the country, and brought down the other two over-tired animals. Which cleared the field very happily.

Chevron liked seeing her horses in front of her, and was patently enjoying herself. She loved jumping and was taking her fences with an off-handed confidence. One could almost hear her humming. She watched the other two «junior» jumpers fail to get over a blind fence and flicked her heels in their faces.

The field was thinning out very nicely.

Brat began to move up.

He passed the fifth of the possibles without effort. The fourth was making a noise like a pipe band but seemed good for a little yet. In front of him at the farthest point of the course were the soldier on the bay charger, the farmer on the big young brown horse, and Roger Clint on the chestnut with the white stockings. Apart from his own Chevron, Clint's was probably the best quality horse in the race, but like the soldier was riding like a veteran, and the farmer like someone who has no respect for his neck.

It was a right-handed course, and the farmer's young horse jumped consistently to the right, so that no one could with any safety come up on the inside of him as long as he hugged the turns tightly. And since no one wanted to go wider than they need at the turns they dallied a little behind the big brown until they could come into the straight and pass him without disadvantage. It was going to be a race when they came back to that last half-mile of park.

Gradually the pipe band that had been so long at his left ear faded backwards into the distance, and when they came back to the park there were only four of them in it: the soldier, the farmer, Clint, and himself. He didn't mind about the other two, but he wanted very much to beat Roger Clint.

Clint had a look round as they left the country behind, and flashed a friendly smile to him. After that there was no time for courtesies. The pace was turned on with the suddenness of a tap, and the four of them pounded down the green avenue between the fluttering red flags as if classic honours were waiting for them at the other end. The big young brown horse began to sprawl; and the charger, though steady as a rock and apparently tireless, seemed to have no turn of speed to finish with. Brat decided to keep Chevron's nose level with the chestnut's quarters and see what transpired. Together they forged ahead of the bay and the brown. The farmer was using his whip and his horse sprawled more at every lift of it. The soldier was sitting still on the bay and evidently hoping that stamina would tell in the end.

Brat had a good look at Stockings and decided that he was tiring rapidly and that Clint, from the careful way he was riding him, knew it. There were two hurdles to go. He had no idea how much speed or stamina Chevron might have left, so he decided that the safest method was to try to trick Clint out of it. He shook Chevron up and took her up level with Stockings as if he were making his effort. Clint increased his speed to match, and together they crossed the last two obstacles, Brat still by his own choice a little in the rear, and therefore out of Clint's vision. Then Brat eased the pressure momentarily, and Clint, taking it for granted that a falling back so near the post argued failing stamina, was glad that he would not have to ask his mount for the last ounce and relaxed a little. Brat gathered Chevron together with all his strength and came like a rocket from behind him. Clint looked, startled, and set Stockings alight again, but it was too late. They were far too near the post for that, as Brat had reckoned. He had stolen the race.

"Of all the 'old soldier' tricks to fall for!" laughed Clint, as they walked their horses together to the weighing-room. "I ought to have my head examined."

And Brat felt that whether Eleanor was going to marry him or not he really did like Roger Clint quite a lot.

Brat had expected that Simon's success would have shored up his disintegrating spiritual structure and that the cracks would have disappeared. But it seemed that the very opposite had happened. The strain of the afternoon followed by the triumph of having beaten a performer like Riding Light had eaten away a little more of the foundation and shaken his equilibrium still further.

"I've never seen Simon so cock-a-hoop," Eleanor said, watching Simon over Brat's shoulder as they danced together that night. She said it as one making an apology. "He is usually so off-hand about his triumphs."

Brat said that it was probably the champagne, and turned her away from her view of Simon.

He had looked forward all day to dancing with Eleanor, but it was with Bee that he had danced first. Just as he had given up his first chance of a ride with Eleanor to walk on Tanbitches with the ghost of Pat Ashby, so when faced with the moment of his first dance with Eleanor he had found something else that he wanted more. He had crossed the room to Bee and said: "Will you dance with me?" They had danced together in a happy quiet, her only remark being: "Who taught you to cheat someone out of a race like that?"

"I didn't have to be taught. It's original sin."

She laughed a little and patted him with the hand that was lying on his shoulder. She was a lovely woman, Bee Ashby, and he loved her. The only other person he had ever loved was a horse called Smoky.

"I haven't seen much of you this afternoon since that awful exhibition of Tony's," Eleanor said.

Brat said that he had wanted to talk to her before the race but that she was in deep conversation with Roger Clint.

"Oh, yes. I remember. His uncle wants him to give up the farm and go and live in Ulster. His uncle is Tim Connell, you know, who has the Kilbarty stud. Tim wants to retire, and would lease the place to Roger, but Roger doesn't want to leave England."

Understandably, Brat thought. England and Eleanor together was heaven enough. "I don't see him here to-night?"

"No, he didn't stay for the dance. He just came to get a silver cup to take home to his wife."

"His wife!"

"Yes, she had their first baby last week, and she sent him to the show to get a christening mug for it. What is the matter?" she asked.

"Remind me sometime to break Ruth's neck," he said, beginning to dance again.

She looked amused and said: "Has Ruth been romancing?"

"She said he wanted to marry you."

"Oh, well, he did have an idea like that but it's a long time ago. And of course he wasn't married last year, so Ruth probably didn't know about it. Are you going to be all patriarchal and supervise my marriage plans?"

"Have you any?"

"None at all."

As the night wore on and he danced more and more with Eleanor, she said: "You really must dance with someone else, Brat."

"I have."

"Only with Peggy Gates."

"So you've been keeping track of me. Am I keeping you from dancing with someone you want to dance with?"

"No. I love dancing with you."

"All right, then."

This was perhaps the first and the last night he would ever dance with Eleanor. A little before midnight they went up together to the buffet, filled their plates, and took them to one of the little tables in the balcony. The buffet was part of the actual hotel building, and the balcony, a piece of Regency ironwork, looked down on the little garden at the side of the hotel. Chinese lanterns hung in the garden and above the tables in the balcony.

"I'm too happy to eat," Eleanor said, and drank her champagne in a dreamy silence. "You look very nice in your evening things, Brat."

"Thank you."

"Do you like my frock?"

"It's the most beautiful frock I ever saw."

"I did hope you would like it."

"Have you had supper already to-night?"

"No. Only some drinks and a sandwich."

"Better eat, then."

She ate in an uninterested fashion that was new in Eleanor.

"It has been an Ashby occasion, hasn't it, the Seventy-fourth Annual Show of the Bures Agricultural.... Stay still for a moment, you have a gnat crawling down your collar."

She leant over and struck the back of his neck lightly. "Oh, it's going down!" In a rough sisterly fashion she bent his head aside with one hand while she retrieved the insect with the other.

"Got it?" he said.

But she was silent, and he looked up at her.

"You're *not* my brother!" she said. "I couldn't feel the way I — " She stopped, horrified.

In the silence the beat of the distant drums came up from the assembly room.

"Oh, Brat, I'm sorry! I didn't mean that! I think I must have drunk too much." She began to sob. "Oh, Brat, I'm sorry!" She gathered

up her bag from the table and stumbled from the dim balcony into the buffet room. "I'll go and lie down and get sober."

Brat let her go and sought counsel in the bar. There was some sort of stunt in the assembly room at midnight, and the bar was deserted except for Simon, all by himself with a bottle of champagne at a table in the far corner.

"Ah! My big brother," said Simon. "Are you not interested in the lottery drawing? Have a drink."

"Thanks. I'll buy my own."

He bought a drink at the bar and carried it down the long room to Simon's table.

"I suppose lottery odds are too long for you," Simon said. "You want the table rigged before you bet."

Brat ignored that. "I haven't had a chance of congratulating you on your win with Timber."

"I don't need praise from you."

Simon was certainly drunk.

"That was very rude of me, wasn't it?" he said like a pleased child. "But I enjoy being rude. I'm behaving very badly to-night, aren't I? I seem to be slipping. Have a drink."

"I've got one."

"You don't like me, do you?" He looked pleased by Brat's dislike.

"Not much."

"Why not?"

"I suppose because you are the only one who doesn't believe that I am Patrick."

"You mean, don't you, that I'm the only one who knows you're not?"

There was a long silence while Brat searched the shining eyes with their odd dark rim.

"You killed him," he said, suddenly sure of it.

"Of course I did." He leaned forward and looked delightedly at Brat. "But you'll never be able to say so, will you? Because of course Patrick isn't dead at all. He's alive, and I'm talking to him."

"How did you do it?"

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you? Well, I'll tell you. It's very simple." He leaned still closer and said in a mock-confidential undertone: "You see, I'm a witch. I can be in two places at once."

He sat back and enjoyed Brat's discomfiture.

"You must think that I'm a lot drunker than I am, my friend," he said. "I've told you about Patrick, because you are my posthumous accomplice. A wonderful epithet, that, and I managed it very well. But if you think that I am going to make you free of the details, you are mistaken."

"Then, why did you do it?"

"He was a very stupid little boy," he said in his airy «Simon» tone, "and not worthy of Latchetts." Then he added, without facade: "I hated him, if you want to know."

He poured himself another glass of the Ayala, and drank it. He laughed under his breath, and said: "It's a wonderful spiritual twinship, isn't it? I can't tell about you and you can't tell about me!"

"You have the advantage of me, though."

"I have? How?"

"You have no scruples."

"Yes; I suppose it is an advantage."

"I have to put up with you, but you have no intention of putting up with me, have you? You did your best to kill me this afternoon."

"Not my best."

"You'll improve on it, I take it?"

"I'll improve."

"I expect you will. A person who can be in two places at once can do better than a loosened girth."

"Oh, much better. But one has to accept the means to hand."

"I see.'

"I suppose you wouldn't like, in return for my confidences, to tell me something?"

"Tell you what?"

"Who you are?"

Brat sat looking at him for a long time.

"Don't you recognise me?" he said.

"No. Who are you?"

"Retribution," said Brat, and finished his drink.

He walked out of the bar and hung for a little over the banisters until his inside settled down and his breath came more easily. He tried to think of some place where he could be alone to think this thing out. There was nowhere in the hotel; even in his bedroom Simon might join him at any moment; he would have to go out.

He went to get his coat from Number 17, and on the way back again he met Bee.

"Has everyone gone crazy?" Bee said angrily. "Eleanor is upstairs crying, Simon is getting drunk in the bar, and now you look as if you had seen a ghost. What is the matter with everyone? Have you had a quarrel?"

"A quarrel? No. Eleanor and Simon have had a wearing day, I expect."

"And what makes you so white about the gills?"

"Ballroom air. I'm from the wide open spaces: remember?"

"I've always understood that the wide open spaces were just seething with dance halls."

"Do you mind if I take the car, Bee?"

"Take it where?"

"I want to see the sun rise over Kenley Vale."

"Alone?"

"Definitely alone."

"Put on your coat," she said. "It's cold out."

At the top of the rise looking over Kenley Vale he stopped the car and shut off the engine. It was still dark and would be dark for some time yet. He got out and stood on the grass verge, leaning against the bonnet, and listened to the silence. The earth and grass smelt strong in the cool damp after the sun of yesterday. The air was motionless. Far away across the Vale a train whistled.

He had a cigarette, and his stomach felt better. But the turmoil had merely moved up. The turmoil was now in his head.

He had been right about Simon. He had been right in seeing the resemblance to Timber: the well-bred creature with the beautiful manners who was also a rogue. Simon had told the truth, back there in the bar. He had been glad to tell him the truth. They said all killers wanted to boast about their killings; Simon must have longed often to tell someone how clever he had been. But he could never tell until now; when he had a «safe» listener.

He, Brat Farrar, was the «safe» listener.

He, Brat Farrar, owned Latchetts, and Simon took it for granted that he would keep what he had taken. That he would keep it as Simon's accessory.

But that, of course, was not possible. The unholy alliance with Loding was one thing; but the alliance that Simon took so mockingly for granted was not possible. It was monstrous. Unthinkable.

And that being that, what was he going to do about it?

Go to the police and say: Look, I'm not Patrick Ashby at all. Patrick Ashby was killed by his brother eight years ago. I know, because he told me so when he was a little drunk.

And then they would point out that in the course of their investigation into the death of Patrick Ashby it was proved that Simon Ashby had spent the relevant hours in the smith's company in Clare.

He could tell them the truth about himself, but nothing would be changed except his own life. Patrick Ashby would remain a suicide.

How had Simon done it?

"One has to accept the means at hand," he had said, about his slackening of the girth.

What "means at hand" had there been that day eight years ago?

The slackening of the girth had been a combination of planning and improvisation. The "signing the book" suggestion had been a long shot. If it worked successfully to get him out of the way, then Simon was free to complete the rest of his plan. If it did not work, then no harm was done. The set-up was innocent to the observer's eye.

That was the way Simon's mind had worked about the girth, and that was the way it had worked eight years ago, undoubtedly. The set-up that was innocent and unquestionable. The using of the means at hand.

How, eight years ago, had Simon used an innocent set of circumstances to provide him with the chance he wanted?

Brat's mind was still toiling round and round the problem when the first sigh of the stirring air told him that the dawn was coming. Presently the wind came again, lifting the leaves this time and ruffling the grass, and the east was grey. He watched the light come. The first bird notes dropped into the quiet.

He had been there for hours and he was no nearer a solution of the problem that faced him.

A policeman came along at leisure, pushing a bicycle, and paused to ask if he were in trouble. Brat said that he was getting some fresh air after a dance.

The policeman looked at his starched linen and accepted his explanation without remark. He looked at the interior of the car and said: "First time I ever saw a young gentleman getting fresh air alone after a dance. You haven't made away with her, by any chance, have you, sir?"

Brat wondered what he would say if he said: "No, but I'm accessory after the fact to another murder."

"She turned me down," he said.

"Ah. I see. Nursing your grief. Take it from me, sir, a week from now you'll be so thankful you'll feel like dancing in the street."

And he pushed his bicycle away along the ridge.

Brat began to shiver.

He got into the car and headed after the policeman. Where could he get something hot, he asked?

There was an all-night cafe at the main crossroads two miles ahead, the policeman said.

At the cafe, warm and bright and mundane after the grey spaces of the dawn, he drank scalding coffee. A buxom woman was frying sausages for two lorry-drivers, and a third was trying his luck at a penny-in-the-slot game in the corner. They glanced incuriously at his dance clothes, but beyond exchanging greetings with him they left him alone.

He came back to Bures at breakfast time, and put the car in the garage. The Chequers vestibule had a littered look; it was still only half-past seven, and show people notoriously made a night of it. He went up to Number 17 and found Simon fast asleep, with all his clothes in one single heap on the floor just as he had peeled them off. He changed into his day clothes, quietly at first and then less carefully as he realised that only long shaking would awaken Simon in his present condition. He looked down at Simon and marvelled. He slept quietly, like a child. Had he grown so used to the thing after eight years that it no longer troubled him, or was it that it never had been a monstrous thing in his estimation?

It was a charming face, except perhaps for the pettish mouth. A delightful face; delicately made and proportioned. There was no more suggestion of wrong-doing about it than there was in the beauty that was Timber.

He went downstairs and washed, wishing that he had thought in time of having a bath. He had been too obsessed by the desire to change clothes without having to talk to Simon.

When he came into the dining-room he found Bee and the twins having breakfast, and joined them.

"Nell and Simon are still asleep," Bee said. "You'd better come back with me and the twins in the car, and let Eleanor take Simon

when they waken."

"What about Tony?"

"Oh, he went back yesterday with Mrs. Stack."

It was a relief to know that he could go back to Latchetts with Bee in peace.

The twins began to talk about Tony's exploit, which was patently going to be part of Latchetts history, and he did not have to make conversation. Bee asked if the dawn had come up to expectation, and remarked that he was looking the better of it.

Through the green early-morning countryside they drove home to Clare, and Brat caught himself looking at it with the emotions of someone who has only a short time to live. He looked at things with a that-will-still-be-there attitude.

He would never come to Bures. He might never even drive with Bee again.

Whatever else Simon's confession meant, it meant the end of his life at Latchetts.

It was Thursday morning and on Sunday Charles Ashby would come sailing up Southampton Water, and nothing would stop the subsequent celebrations. He followed Bee into the hall at Latchetts feeling desperate.

"Do you mind if I desert you and go into Westover?" he asked Bee.

"No, I think you are due a little rest from the family. Simon is for ever running away."

So he took the bus into Westover and waited until it was time for Mr. Macallan to be having his mid-morning coffee. He went, to the *Westover Times* office and asked to see the files. The office boy, who showed no sign of ever having seen him before, took him to the cellar and showed him where they were. Brat read the report of the inquest all over again, but could find no help there.

Perhaps in the full report there would be something?

He went out and looked up Colonel Smollett in the telephone book. Where, he asked the Colonel, would the report of the inquest on himself be now? With the police? Well, would he make it easy for him to see it?

The Colonel would, but he considered it a most morbid and undesirable ambition, and implored young Ashby to think again.

So armed with the Colonel's telephoned introduction, he went to see a highly amused police force, who sat him down in a leather armchair and offered him cigarettes, and set before him the coroner's report of eight years ago with the empressment of a conjurer who has produced the rabbit from the hat.

He read it all through several times. It was merely the Westover Times' report in greater detail.

He thanked the police, offered them cigarettes in his turn, and went away as empty of suggestion as he had come. He went down to the harbour and hung over the wall, staring westward at the cliffs.

He had a fixed point, anyhow. A fixed point that could not be altered. Simon Ashby was in Clare that day. That was held to by a man who had no reason for lying, and no suspicion that the fact was of any importance. Simon had never been long enough away from Mr. Pilbeam's vicinity to make his absence felt.

Pat Ashby must have been killed between the time that old Abel met him in the early afternoon and the moment when Mr. Pilbeam had to chase Simon home for six o'clock supper.

Well, there was that old saying about Mahomet and the mountain.

He thought the Mahomet theory over, but was stumped by the coat on the cliff-top. It was Simon who had written that note, but Simon was never out of Clare.

It was two o'clock when he came to himself, and he went to have lunch at a small pub in the harbour. They had nothing much left, but it did not matter because he sat staring at his plate until they put the bill in front of him.

He went back to Latchetts and without going to the house went to the stables and took out one of the horses that had not been at Bures. There was no one about but Arthur, who reported that all the horses were safely back and all well except that Buster had an overreach.

"Taking him out like that, sir?" Arthur asked, nodding at Brat's tweed suit. And Brat said that he was.

He turned up to the down as he had that first morning when he took out Timber, and did again what he had done on Timber's back. But all the glory was gone. The whole world looked sick. Life itself tasted bad.

He dismounted and sat down where he had sat that morning a month ago, looking out over the small green valley. It had seemed paradise to him then. Even that silly girl who had come and talked to him had not sufficed to spoil it for him. He remembered how her eyes had popped when she found he was not Simon. She had come there sure of seeing Simon because it was his favourite place for exercising the horses. Because he....

The horse by his side threw up his head as Brat's sudden movement jerked the bit in his mouth.

Because he...?

He listened to the girl's voice in his mind. Then he got slowly to his feet and stood a long time staring across the valley.

He knew now how Simon had done it. And he also knew the answer to something that had puzzled him. He knew why Simon had been afraid that, by some miracle, it was the real Patrick who had come back.

He got on the horse and went back to the stables. The great clouds were racing up from the south-west and it was beginning to rain. In the saddle room he took a sheet of writing paper from the desk and wrote on it: "Out for dinner. Leave the front door on the latch for me, and don't worry if I am late." He put it in an envelope, addressed it to Bee, and asked Arthur to hand it in at the house when he was passing. He took his burberry from the back of the saddle-room door, and went out into the rain, away from Latchetts. He had the knowledge now. What was he going to do with it?

He walked without conscious purpose, unaware of anything but the dreadful question to be answered. He came to the smithy where Mr. Pilbeam was still working, and greeted him, and exchanged opinions on the work in hand and on the weather to come, without having for a moment ceased to battle with the thing in his mind.

He walked up the path to Tanbitches and up the hill over the wet grass to the crown of beeches, and walked there to and fro among the great boles of the trees, distracted and stricken.

How could he bring this thing on Bee?

On Eleanor? On Latchetts?

Had he not already done Latchetts sufficient harm?

Would it matter so much if Simon were left in possession as he had been for eight years?

Who had been harmed by that? Only one person: Patrick.

If Simon was to be brought to justice for Patrick's death, it would mean horror beyond horror for Bee and the rest.

He didn't have to do it at all. He could go away; stage a suicide. After all, Simon had staged Patrick's suicide, and it had passed a police investigation. If a boy of thirteen could do that he could do it. He could just drop out, and things would be as they were a month ago.

And-Pat Ashby?

But Pat, if he could choose, would not want justice on Simon at the cost of his family's ruin. Not Pat, who had been kind and always thought first of others.

And Simon?

Was he to make good Simon's monstrous supposition that he would do nothing? Was Simon to spend a long life as the owner of Latchetts? Were Simon's children to inherit Latchetts?

But they would still be Ashbys. If Simon were brought to justice there would be no more Ashbys at Latchetts.

And how would it advantage Latchetts to have its inheritance made safe by the condoning of murder?

Was it not, perhaps, to uncover that murder that he had come by such strange ways to Latchetts?

He had come half across a world to that meeting with Loding in the street, and he had said to himself that so strange a chance must be destiny. But he had not imagined it to be an important destiny. Now, it would seem, it was an all-important one.

What was he to do? Who could advise him? Decide for him? It was not fair that this should be put on his shoulders. He had not the wisdom, the experience, to deal with a thing of this magnitude.

"I am retribution," he had said to Simon, and meant it. But that was before he had the weapon of retribution in his hand.

What was he to do?

Go to the police to-night? To-morrow?

Do nothing, and let the celebrations begin when Charles Ashby came home?

What was he to do?

It was late that night that George Peck, sitting in his study and conscious every now and then even from his distant vantage point in Thebes of the lashing rain on the window of the Rectory in Clare, heard a tapping at that window, and came back from Thebes and went to the front door. It was by no means the first time that people had tapped on that window late at night.

In the light from the hall he saw one of the Ashbys, he could not tell which because the soaked hat almost obscured the face.

"Rector, may I come in and talk to you?"

"Of course, Patrick. Come in."

Brat stood on the step, the rain sluicing from his coat.

"I'm afraid I'm very wet," he said vaguely.

The Rector looked down and saw that the grey tweed of his trousers was black, and his shoes an oozing pulp. His eyes went sharply to the boy's face. Brat had taken off his limp hat and the rain-water from his soaked hair was running down his face.

"Take off your coat and leave it here," the Rector said. "I'll give you another one when you are ready to go." He went to the hall cloakroom and came back with a towel. "Rub your head with that."

Brat did as he was told, with the obedient air and fumbling movements of a child. The Rector went through to the empty kitchen and brought a kettle of water.

"Come in," he said. "Just drop the towel where your wet coat is." He led the way into his study and put the kettle on an electric ring. "That will be hot in no time. I often make tea for myself when I sit up late. What was it you wanted to talk to me about?"

"A pit in Dothan."

"What?"

"I'm sorry. My mind has stopped working. Have you a drink of any kind?"

The Rector had meant to put the whisky in the tea, as a toddy, but he poured a stiff one now and Brat drank it.

"Thank you. I am sorry to come and worry you like this, but I had to talk to you. I hope you don't mind."

"I am here to be talked to. Some more whisky?"

"No, thanks."

"Then let me give you some dry shoes."

"Oh, no, thank you. I'm used to being wet, you know. Rector, I want your advice about something very important, but can I talk to you as if-as if it were confessional? I mean, without your feeling that you must do something about it."

"Whatever you say I shall treat as confession, certainly."

"Well, first I have to tell you something. I am not Patrick Ashby."

"No," agreed the Rector. And Brat stared.

"You mean-you mean, you knew I wasn't Patrick?"

"I rather thought that you weren't."

"Why?"

"There is more to any person than a physical presence; there is an aura, a personality, a being. And I was almost sure the first time I met you that I had never met you before. There was nothing in you that I recognised, although you have many things in common with Patrick as well as your appearance."

"And you did nothing about it!"

"What do you suggest that I should have done? Your lawyer, your family, and your friends had all accepted and welcomed you. I had no evidence to show that you were not Patrick. Nothing but my own belief that you weren't. What good would it have done to express my disbelief? It did not seem to me that it would be long before the situation resolved itself without my interference."

"You mean: that I should be found out."

"No. I mean that you did not seem to me someone who would be happy in the life you had chosen. Judging by your visit to-night, I was right."

"But I didn't come here to-night just to confess to not being Patrick."

"No?"

"No, that is only-I had to tell you that because it was the only way you could understand what has-I wish my mind was clearer. I've been walking about trying to get things straight."

"Perhaps if you told me first how you came to Latchetts at all, it would at least clear *my* mind."

"I–I met someone in America who had lived in Clare. They-she thought I looked like an Ashby, and suggested that I should pretend to be Patrick."

"And you were to pay her a share of the proceeds of the deception."

"Yes."

"I can only say that she earned her percentage whatever it was. As a tutor she must be remarkable. I have never seen a better piece of coaching. Are you American, then?"

"No," said Brat, and the Rector smiled faintly at the emphasis. "I was brought up in an orphanage. I was left on its doorstep."

And he sketched for the Rector the story of his life.

"I have heard of your orphanage," the Rector said, when he had finished. "It explains one thing that puzzled me: your good upbringing." He poured tea, and added whisky. "Would you like something more substantial than biscuits, by the way? No? Then have the oatmeal ones; they are very filling."

"I had to tell you all this because of something I found out. Patrick didn't commit suicide. He was murdered."

The Rector set down the cup he was holding. For the first time he looked startled.

"Murdered? By whom?"

"His brother."

"Simon?"

"Yes."

"But, Patrick! That — What is your name, by the way?"

"You forget. I haven't got one. I've always been called Brat. It was a corruption of Bartholomew."

"But my dear fellow, that is absurd. What evidence have you of anything so incredible?"

"I have Simon's word for it."

"Simon told you?"

"He boasted about it. He said that I could never do anything about it because it would mean giving myself away. He knew as soon as he saw me that I wasn't Patrick, you see."

"When did this extraordinary conversation take place?"

"Last night, at the Bures ball. It wasn't as sudden as it sounds. I began to wonder about Simon long before that, and I challenged him about it because of something he said about knowing I wasn't Patrick, and he laughed and boasted about it."

"I think that the setting of this scene does a lot to explain it."

"You mean you think we were drunk?"

"Not exactly. Elated, shall we say. And you challenged Simon on the subject, and Simon with his perverted sense of mischief provided you with what you expected from him."

"Do you really believe I have as little intelligence as that?" Brat asked quietly.

"It surprises me, I must admit. I have always considered you to be highly intelligent."

"Then believe me, I am not here because of a piece of fooling on Simon's part. Patrick didn't commit suicide. Simon killed him. Deliberately. And what is more, I know how he did it."

And he told him.

"But Brat, you have no evidence even now. That is theory, what you have just told me. An ingenious and likely theory, I admit. It has the merit of simplicity. But you have no evidence whatsoever."

"We can get the evidence, if the police once know the truth. But that isn't what I want to know. What I want advice about is-well, whether to let sleeping dogs lie."

And he explained his dilemma.

But the Rector, rather surprisingly in view of his silence about his doubts of Brat's identity, had no doubts on the subject at all. If murder had been done, then the law must be invoked. Anything else was anarchy.

His point was that Brat had no case against Simon. His mind had run on murder, he had taunted Simon with it, Simon had one of his well-known impish moments and confessed, and Brat after long thought had found a theory to fit the alleged confession.

"And you think that I've been walking about in the rain since four o'clock because of a little joke of Simon's? You think that I came here to-night and confessed to not being Patrick because of a little joke of Simon's?" The Rector was silent. "Tell me, Rector, were you surprised when Pat committed suicide?"

"Exceedingly."

"Do you know anyone who wasn't surprised?"

"No. But suicide is a surprising thing."

"I give up," Brat said.

In the contemplative silence that followed, the Rector said: "I see what you meant by the pit in Dothan. That was an excellent upbringing at the orphanage."

"It was a very thoroughly Biblical one, if that is what you mean. Simon knows that story, too, by the way."

"I expect so, but how do you happen to know?"

"When he heard that Patrick had come back he couldn't help, in spite of his denials, a fear that it might be true. There had been that other case, you see. That time the victim had survived by a miracle. He was afraid that by some miracle Patrick had survived. I know, because he came into that room, the first day I was there, strung up to face something dreadful. And his relief when he saw me was almost funny."

He drank down the rest of his tea and looked quizzically at the Rector. In spite of himself he was beginning to feel better.

"Another of Simon's little jokes was to send me out that first day on Timber, without telling me he was a rogue. But I suppose that was just his 'perverted sense of mischief. And still another of his little jokes was to loosen my girth yesterday before I started a race on Chevron. But I suppose that was just one of his 'well-known impish moments'."

The Rector's deep eyes considered Brat.

"I am not defending Simon-he has never been an admirable character-but tricks played on an interloper, a pretender-even dangerous tricks, are one thing, and the murder of a well-loved brother is quite another. Why, by the way, did Simon not denounce you at once if he did not believe you were his brother?"

"For the same reason that you didn't."

"I see. He would merely be held to be-difficult."

"And of course, having got rid of one Patrick with impunity, he looked forward with confidence to getting rid of another."

"Brat, I wish I could convince you that this is a figment of your imagination."

"You must have a great respect for my imaginative powers."

"If you look back, critically and honestly, you must see how the thing grew in your mind from quite small beginnings. An edifice of your own making."

And that, when Brat took his leave towards two o'clock in the morning, was still the Rector's opinion.

He offered Brat a bed, but Brat compromised on the loan of a waterproof and a torch, and found his way back to Latchetts by the soaking field-path with the rain still pouring hopelessly down.

"Come and see me again before you decide anything," the Rector had said; but he had at least been helpful in one direction. He had answered Brat's main question. If it was a choice between love and justice, the choice had to be justice.

He found the front door of Latchetts unlocked, a note from Bee on the hall table, saying: "Soup on the ring in the pantry," and a silver cup on an ebony stand bearing a card in Eleanor's writing which said: "You forgot this, you blase rodeo hound!"

He put out the lights and crept up through the silent house to his bed in the old night nursery. Someone had put a hot-water bottle in his bed. He was asleep almost before his head touched the pillow.

On Friday morning Simon came bright and cheerful to breakfast and greeted Brat with pleasure. He commented on the process of the «trunk» murder investigations, the character of Tattie Thacker (whose value had been estimated by the court at one half-penny) and the iniquity of poisoning as a means of ridding oneself of a human encumbrance. Except for an occasional gleam in his eye he showed no awareness of their changed relationship. He was taking their "spiritual twinship" for granted.

Eleanor too seemed to be back on the old footing, although she seemed shy, like someone who has made a social gaffe. She suggested that in the afternoon they should take the four silver cups into Westover and give instructions for their engraving.

"It will be nice to have 'Patrick Ashby' on a cup again," she said.

"Yes, won't it!" Simon said.

Simon evidently looked forward to years of baiting his spiritual twin. But when Brat said, in answer to Bee, that he had talked late with the Rector, Simon's head came up as if he had heard a warning. And after that Brat caught Simon's glance at him every now and then.

When Eleanor and Brat were setting off for Westover in the afternoon, he appeared and insisted on making a third in the bug's scanty space. One of the cups was his own unaided work, he said, and he had a right to say what was to go on it, and whether it should be in Roman, Arabic, Hebrew, Greek or Cyrillic script, or mere shorthand.

So powerful was Simon's indifferent charm that even Brat found himself on the verge of wondering whether the Rector had been right and he had built his story out of whole cloth. But he remembered the horse that Farmer Gates had bought for his daughter Peggy, and concluded that that was a more reliable guide to Simon than anything Simon himself might provide.

When they had decided on the lettering for the names on the cups, Simon and Eleanor went to tea, but Brat said that he had some shopping to do. Brat had decided what he had to do in the present impasse. He could not go to the police with his story in its present form with any more hope of being believed than he had been by the Rector. If the Rector, who knew Simon's weaknesses, refused to believe without concrete evidence, how much more would the police refuse to believe, when Simon to them was not a wayward boy but Mr. Ashby of Latchetts?

Brat therefore proposed to provide them with the evidence.

He went down to the harbour and sought a chandler's, and there, after some consultation and a deal of choosing, bought two hundred feet of rope. The rope was so thin that it was not much thicker than stout string, but its breaking-point under tension was very much that of steel. He asked them to pack it in a cardboard box and deliver it to the Angel garage, where the bug was. He received it at the garage and packed it away in the luggage compartment.

When the others arrived to go home he was waiting innocently in the car with an evening paper.

They had packed themselves into the bug and were preparing to go when Simon said: "Whoa! We've forgotten to leave that old tire with them," and he got out and opened the rear compartment to get the tire.

"What is in the box, Nell?"

"I didn't put any box there," Eleanor said, not moving. "It can't be for us."

"It's mine," Brat said.

"What is it?"

"Secret."

"James Fryer and Son, Ship Chandlers," said Simon's voice.

Oh, God! There was a label on the box that he had not noticed.

Simon shut the luggage compartment with a bang and came back to his seat. "What have you been buying, Brat? One of those ships in a bottle? No, it is a little too large for that. One of those ships not in a bottle. One of those full-sailed galleons that sit on suburban sideboards to delight the heart of our Island Race and comfort it for being sick on the trip to Margate."

"Don't be a fool, Simon. What is it, Brat? Is it really a secret?"

If Simon wanted to find out what was in the box he most certainly would, by one method or another. And to make a mystery of it was to call attention to it. Far better to be apparently frank about it.

"If you must know, I'm afraid I'll lose the knack of spinning a rope, so I've bought some to practise on."

Eleanor was delighted. Brat must show them some spinning that very evening.

"No. Not till I've tried it out in camera first."

"You'll teach me how, won't you?"

Yes, he would teach her how to throw a rope. She was going to hate him one day soon, if that rope did what it was bought for.

When they arrived back at Latchetts he took the rope out and left it openly in the hall. Bee asked about it, and accepted the explanation of its presence, and no one took any more notice of it. He wished that his last short time at Latchetts did not have to be spent in lying. It was odd that, having spent his whole time at Latchetts lying like a Levantine, he should mind so much about this smaller deception.

There was still time to do nothing about it. To leave the rope there, and not ask it to answer any question. It was the wrong kind of rope for throwing, but he could change it for the right kind.

But when night came, and he was alone in his room, he knew that he had no choice. This was what he had come half across a world to do, and he was going to do it.

The household went early to bed, still tired from their excitements at Bures, and he gave them till half-past twelve, and then prospected. There seemed to be no light anywhere. There was certainly no sound. He went downstairs and took the rope from its

corner. He unlatched the dining-room window, stepped over the sill into the night, and drew it gently down again behind him. He waited for any reaction, but there was none.

He made his way softly over the gravel to the grass, sat down in the shelter of the first paddock trees, out of the range of the windows, and without need of any light, deftly knotted footholds at intervals down the length of rope. It was a pleasant reassuring thing to feel the familiar touch of rope after so long. It was a well-bred rope and answered sweetly to his demands. He felt grateful to James Fryer and Son.

He wound the rope and put the coil of it over his shoulder. In half an hour the moon would be up. It was a young moon, and not much of a lamp, but he had two good torches in his pocket and he did not very much desire a full moon's frankness to-night.

Every five minutes he stopped and waited to see if he had been followed. But nothing at all moved in the night. Not even a cat.

The grey light of the coming moon greeted him as he came towards the foot of Tanbitches, and he found the path to Westover without having to flick a torch. He followed it up a little and then, when he could see the beech-crown of the hill against the sky, he struck off it until he reached the thicket on the upper side of the old quarry. There he sat down and waited. But again there was no sound in all the sleeping countryside except the sudden cry of a sheep on the hill. He tied the rope round the bole of the largest of the young beeches that had seeded themselves there, and let it uncoil itself until it fell over the edge of the quarry into the green thickness below. This was the steep side of the quarry. The lower side had had a narrow entrance, but it had long ago fallen together and become overgrown with an impenetrable denseness of briars. Old Abel had told him all about it the day they had sat there and talked of Patrick. Abel knew all about the quarry because he had once rescued a sheep from it. It was much easier to go down the sheer face, Abel said, than in at the lower side. In fact, to go in at the lower side, or any other side, was plumb impossible. No, there was no water in it; at least there wasn't any twenty years ago, which was when last he went down after a sheep; the water all drained away under the hill to the sear

Brat tested the rope several times, and felt for it fraying. But the bole of the tree was smooth, and where it went over the lip of the quarry he had padded it. He slid over the edge and felt for his first toe-hold. Now that he was level with the ground he was more aware of the brightness of the sky. He could see the dark shape of the low thicket against it, and the larger darkness of the tree above him.

He had found his first foothold in the rope now, but his hands were still on the rope where it lay taut on the turf.

"I should hate," said Simon's voice in its most «Simon» drawl, "to let you go without an appropriate farewell. I mean, I could just cut the rope and let you think, if you had time to think at all, that it had broken. But that wouldn't be any fun, would it?"

Brat could see his bulk against the sky. From the shape of it, he was half-kneeling on the edge, by the rope. Brat could touch him by putting out a hand.

Fool that he had been to underrate Simon. Simon had taken no chances. He hadn't even taken the chance of following him. He had come first and waited.

"Cutting the rope won't do much good," he said. "I'll only land in the branches of some tree farther down, and yell my head off until someone comes."

"I know better than that. A personal acquaintance of mine, this quarry is. Almost a relation, one might say." He expelled his breath in a whispered laugh. "A sheer drop to the ground, half a hillside away."

Brat wondered if he had time to slide down the rope in one swift rush before Simon cut it. The footholds had been for coming up again. He could just ignore them and slide. Would he be near enough the bottom before Simon realised what he had done?

Or would it be better — ? Yes. His hand tightened on the rope and he pressed on his toe-hold and lifted himself until he had almost got one knee on the turf again. But Simon must have his hand on the rope somewhere. He had felt the movement.

"Oh, no, you don't!" he said, and brought his heel down on Brat's hand. Brat grabbed the foot with his other hand and hung on, his fingers in the opening of the shoe. Simon brought his knife down on Brat's wrist and Brat yelled, but continued to hang on. He dragged his right hand from under Simon's shoe and caught him round the back of the ankle. He was covering with his body the rope in front of Simon and as long as he held on Simon could not turn to cut the rope behind him. It is very upsetting to have one's foot grasped from below when one is standing on the very edge of a precipice.

"Let go!" said Simon, stabbing frantically.

"If you don't stop that," panted Brat, "I'll drag you over with me."

"Let go! Let go!" Simon said, hitting wildly in blind panic and not listening.

Brat removed the hand that was holding on to the edge of the shoe and caught the knife-hand as it came down. He now had his right hand round Simon's left ankle, and his left hand was clutching Simon's right wrist.

Simon screamed and pulled away, but Brat hung his weight on the wrist. He had the confidence of a toe-hold, but Simon had nothing to brace himself against. Simon tore at the hand that was hanging on to his knife-wrist, and Brat, with a great heave, took his right hand from Simon's foot and caught Simon's left hand with it. He had now got Simon by both wrists, and Simon was bent over like a bow above him.

"Drop that knife!" he said.

As he said it he felt the turf at the quarry edge settle a little and slide forward. It made no difference to him, except to press him out a little from the face of the cliff. But to Simon, already bent over by the weight of Brat's arms and body, it was fatal.

Horrified, Brat saw the dark mass come forward on top of him. It struck him from his toe-hold, and he fell down with it into darkness.

A great light exploded in his head, and he ceased to know anything.

Bee sat in the dingy cafe with a cup of slopped coffee in front of her and read the sign on the other side of the road for the hundredth time in the last forty-eight hours. The sign said: MOTORISTS. PLEASE REFRAIN FROM USING YOUR HORN. THIS IS A HOSPITAL. It was only seven o'clock in the morning, but the cafe opened at six, and there was always at least one other customer having a meal as she sat there. She did not notice them. She just sat with a cup of coffee in front of her and stared at the hospital wall opposite. She was an old inhabitant of the cafe by now. "Better go out and have a meal," they would say kindly, and she would cross the road and sit for a little with a cup of coffee in front of her and then go back again.

Her life had narrowed down to this pendulum existence between the hospital and cafe. She found it difficult to remember a past, and quite impossible to visualise a future. There was only the "now," a dreary half-world of grey misery. Last night they had given her a cot in one of the sisters' rooms, and the night before that she had spent in the hospital waiting-room. There were two phrases that they used to her, and they were as sickeningly familiar as the sign on their wall: "No, no change," they would say, or, "Better go out and get a meal."

The slatternly girl came and pushed a fresh cup of coffee in front of her and took away the one she had. "That one's cold," said the slatternly girl, "and you haven't even touched it." The fresh cup was slopped over, too. She was grateful to the slatternly girl but felt outraged by her sympathy. She was enjoying the vicarious drama of her presence in the cafe, and its implications.

MOTORISTS. PLEASE REFRAIN FROM USING — She must stop reading that thing. Must look at something else. The blue checked pattern of the plastic tablecloth, perhaps. One, two, three, four, five, six — Oh, no. Not counting things.

The door opened and Dr. Spence came in, his red hair tumbled and his chin unshaved. He said "Coffee!" to the girl, and slid into the seat beside her.

"Well?" she said.

"Still alive."

"Conscious?"

"No. But there are better indications. I mean, of a chance of his regaining consciousness, not necessarily of-his living."

"I coo !

"We know about the skull fracture, but there are no means of telling what other injuries there may be."

"No."

"You oughtn't to be living on cups of coffee. That's all you've been having, isn't it?"

"She hasn't been having that," said the slatternly girl, putting down his full cup. "She just sits and looks at them."

A wave of weary anger rose in her at the slatternly girl's appropriation of her concerns.

"Better let me take you downtown and give you a meal."

"No. No, thank you."

"The Angel is only a mile away, and you can rest properly there and — "

"No. No, I can't go as far away as that. I'll drink this cup. It's nice and hot."

Spence gulped down his coffee and paid for it. He hesitated a moment as if reluctant to leave her. "I have to go back to Clare now. You know I shouldn't leave him if he wasn't in good hands, don't you? They'll do more for him than I ever could."

"You've done wonders for all of us," she said. "I shall never forget it."

Now that she had begun drinking the coffee she went on drinking it, and did not look up when the door opened again. It would not be another message from the hospital already, and nothing had any importance for her that was not a message from the hospital. She was surprised when George Peck sat down beside her.

"Spence told me I should find you here."

"George!" she said. "What are you doing in Westover at this hour of the morning?"

"I have come to bring you comfort that Simon is dead."

"Comfort?"

"Yes."

He took something from an envelope and laid it in front of her on the table. It was weatherworn but recognisable. It was a slender black stylograph with a decoration consisting of a thin yellow spiral.

She looked at it a long time without touching it, then looked up at the Rector.

"Then they have found-it?"

"Yes. It was there. Do you want to talk about it here? Wouldn't you prefer to go back to the hospital?"

"What difference does it make? They are both just places where one waits."

"Coffee?" said the slatternly girl, appearing at George's shoulder.

"No; no, thank you."

"Righteeo!"

"What-what is there? I mean, what-what is left? What did they find?"

"Just bones, my dear. A skeleton. Under three feet of leaf mould. And some shreds of cloth."

"And his pen?"

"That was separate," he said carefully.

"You mean, it-had been-that it had been thrown down after?"

"Not necessarily, but-probably."

"I see."

"I don't know whether you will find it comforting or not-I think it is-but the police surgeon is of the opinion that he was not alive-or perhaps it would be more accurate to say not conscious-when he — "

"When he was thrown over," Bee said for him.

"Yes. The nature of the skull injury, I understand, leads him to that conclusion."

"Yes. Yes, I am glad, of course. He probably knew nothing about it. Just ended quite happy on a summer afternoon."

"There were some small objects in the cloth. Things that he probably had in his trousers pockets. But the police have kept these. Colonel Smollett gave me this," he picked up the stylograph and put it back in its envelope, "and asked me to show it you so that you might identify it. What news from the hospital? Spence was driving away when I saw him."

"None. He is not conscious."

"I blame myself greatly for that, you know," the Rector said. "If I had listened with understanding he would not have been driven to this *sub rosa* proceeding, to that crazy night-time search."

"George, we must do something to find out who he is."

"But I understand that the orphanage — "

"Oh, I know. They made the usual inquiries. But I don't suppose they were very persistent ones. We could do much better, surely."

"Starting from the pre-supposition that he has Ashby blood in him?"

"Yes. I can't believe that a resemblance like that could exist without it. The coincidence would be too great."

"Very well, my dear. Do you want it put in hand-now?"

"Yes. Especially now. Time may be precious."

"I'll speak to Colonel Smollett about it. He'll know how to go about it. I talked to him about the inquest, and he thinks it may be possible to manage without your appearing. Nancy told me to ask you if you would like her to come in to Westover to be with you, or if it would only worry you to have someone around."

"Dear Nan. Say it is easier alone, will you? But thank her. Tell her to stand by Eleanor, rather. It must he dreadful for Nell, having to toil with unimportant things in the stables."

"I think it must be a soothing thing to have to devote oneself to the routine demands of the animal world."

"Did you break the news to her, as you promised? The news that Brat was not Patrick?"

"Yes. I dreaded it, Bee, I confess frankly. You had given me one of the hardest tasks of my life. She was still fresh from the shock of knowing that Simon had been killed. I dreaded it. But the event was surprising."

"What did she do?"

"She kissed me."

The door opened, and a probationer, flushed and young and pretty, and looking in her lilac print and spreading white linen like a visitor from another world, stood in the dim opening. She saw Bee and came over to her.

"Are you Miss Ashby, please?"

"Yes?" said Bee, half rising.

"Miss *Beatrice* Ashby? Oh, that's nice. Your nephew is conscious now, but he doesn't recognise anyone or where he is; he just keeps talking about someone called Bee, and we thought it might be you. So Sister sent me across to see if I could find you. I'm sorry to interrupt you, and you haven't finished your coffee, have you, but you see — "

"Yes, yes," said Bee, already at the door.

"He may be quieter, you see, if you are there," the probationer said, following her out. "They often are, when someone they know is there, even if they don't actually recognise them. It's funny. It's as if they could see them through their skin. I've noticed it often. They'll say, Eileen? — or whoever it is. And Eileen says, Yes. And then they're quiet for a bit. But if anyone else says yes, nine times out of ten they're not fooled at all, and get restless and fractious. It's very strange."

What really was strange was to hear that steady stream of words from the lips of the normally silent Brat. For a day and a night and a day again she sat by his bed and listened to that restless torrent of talk. "Bee?" he would say, just as the little probationer had recounted to her. And she would say: "Yes, I'm here," and he would go back reassured to whatever world he was wandering in.

His most constant belief was that this was the time he had broken his leg, and this the same hospital; and he was torn with anxiety about it. "I'll be able to ride again, won't I? There's nothing really wrong with my leg, is there? They won't take it off, will they?"

"No," she would say, "everything is all right."

And once, when he was quieter: "Are you very angry with me, Bee?"

"No, I'm not angry with you. Go to sleep."

The world went on outside the hospital; ships arrived in Southampton Water, inquests were held, bodies were consigned to the earth, but for Bee the world had narrowed to the room where Brat was and her cot in the Sister's room.

On Wednesday morning Charles Ashby arrived at the hospital, padding lightly down the polished corridors on his large noiseless feet. Bee went down to receive him and took him up to Brat's room. He had hugged her as he used to when she was a little girl, and she felt warm and comforted.

"Dear Uncle Charles. I'm so glad you were fifteen years younger than Father, or you wouldn't be here to be a comfort to us all."

"The great point in being fifteen years younger than your brother is that you don't have to wear his cast-offs," Charles said.

"He's asleep just now," she said, pausing outside Brat's room, "so you'll be very quiet, won't you?"

Charles took one look at the young face with the slack jaw, the blue shadows under the closed eyes, and the grey haze of stubble, and said: "Walter."

"His name is Brat."

"I know. I wasn't addressing him. I was merely pointing out the resemblance to Walter. That is exactly what Walter used to look like, at his age, when he had a hangover."

Bee came nearer and looked. "Walter's son?"

"Undoubtedly."

"I don't see any resemblance, somehow. He doesn't look like anyone but himself, now."

"You never saw Walter sleeping it off." He looked at the boy a little longer. "A better face than Walter's, though. A good face." He followed her into the corridor. "I hear you all liked him."

"We loved him," she said.

"Well, it's all very sad, very sad. Who was his accomplice, do you know?"

"Someone in America."

"Yes, so George Peck told me. But who would that be? Who went to America from Clare?"

"The Willett family went to Canada. And they had daughters. It was a woman, you know. Perhaps they finished up in the States."

"If it was a woman I'll eat my hat."

"I feel that way too."

"Do you? Good girl. You're an admirably intelligent woman, Bee. Nice-looking, too. What are we going to do about the boy? For the future, I mean."

"We don't know yet if he has a future," she said.

Only the Rector, Bee, Charles, Eleanor, and the firm of Cosset, Thring and Noble knew, so far, that Brat was not Patrick Ashby. And the police.

The police, that is, at what is known as "the highest level."

The police had been told everything, and they were now engaged in their own admirable fashion in smoothing out the mess to the best of their ability without breaking any of the laws which they were engaged to uphold. Simon Ashby was dead. It was to no one's advantage to uncover the story of his crime. By a process of not saying too much, the ritual of the Law might be complied with, leaving unwanted truths still buried; a harrow dragging over earth that held below its surface unexploded bombs.

The coroner sat on the poor bones found in the quarry, and adjourned the inquest *sine die*. No one in the neighbourhood had ever been reported missing. Tanbitches, on the other hand, was a favourite camping ground for gipsies, who were not given to reporting accidents to the police. Nothing remained of the clothing but a few scraps of unrecognisable cloth. The objects found in the vicinity of the bones were unidentifiable; they consisted of a corroded piece of metal that might once have been a whistle, another corroded piece still recognisable as a knife, and several coins of small denominations.

"George!" said Bee. "What became of the pen?"

"The stylograph? I lost it."

"George!"

"Someone had to lose it, my dear. Colonel Smollett couldn't; he's a soldier, with a soldier's sense of duty. The police couldn't; they have their self-respect and their duty to the public to consider. But my conscience is between me and my God. I think they were touchingly grateful to me in their tacit way."

The adjourned inquest on Simon Ashby came later, since it had been postponed until Brat was capable of being interviewed in hospital. The policeman who had interviewed him reported that Mr. Ashby could remember nothing about the accident, or why he should have gone there with his brother at that hour to climb down into the quarry. He had an idea that it was the result of a bet. Something about whether there was water in the old quarry or not, he thought; but could not take his oath on it since his recollection was vague. He had serious head injuries and was still very ill. He did know, however, that he had found out from Abel Tusk that there was no water there; and Simon probably had said that that was highly unlikely, and so the contest may have arisen.

Abel Tusk corroborated the fact that Patrick Ashby had asked him about water in the quarry, and that it was an unusual thing to find the floor of an old quarry dry. It was Abel Tusk who had given the first alarm of the accident. He had been out on the hill with his sheep and had heard what he took to be cries for help from the direction of the quarry, and had gone there as fast as he could and found the undamaged rope, and had gone down to the blacksmith's and used his telephone to call the police.

Bee, replying to the coroner, agreed that she would most certainly have taken steps to put an end to any such plan had she heard about it. And the coroner expressed his opinion that it was for that reason that the thing had been done *sub rosa*.

The verdict was death by misadventure, and the coroner expressed his sympathy with the family on the loss of this high-spirited young man.

So the problem of Simon was settled. Simon who, before he was fourteen, had killed his brother, calmly written a note on that brother's behalf, tossed the pen into the abyss after his brother's body, and gone home calmly to six o'clock supper when he was chased out of the smithy. Who had joined the night search for his brother on his pony, and some time during that long night had taken his brother's coat to the cliff-top and left it there with the note in the pocket. Who was now to be mourned by the countryside as a high-spirited young man of memorable charm.

The problem of Brat remained.

Not the problem of who he was, but of the problem of his future. The doctors had decided that, having against all probability lived so long, he was likely to go on living. He would need long care, however, and a peaceful life if he was to recover properly.

"Uncle Charles came to see you one day when you were ill," Bee said to him when he was well enough to keep his attention on a subject. "He was astonished by your resemblance to Walter Ashby. My cousin."

"Yes?" said Brat. He was not interested. What did it matter now?

"We began inquiries about you."

"The police did that," he said wearily. "Years ago."

"Yes, but they had very little to come and go on. Only that a young girl had arrived by train with a baby, and gone away by train without one. The train had come from the crowded Birmingham district with all its ramifications. We started at the other end. Walter's end. We went back to where Walter was, somewhere about twenty-two years ago, and began from there. Walter was a rolling stone, so it wasn't easy, but we did find out that, among his other jobs, he was in charge of a stable in Gloucestershire for a couple of months while the owner was away having an operation. The household was a housekeeper and a young girl who cooked. She was a very good cook, but her real ambition was to be a hospital nurse. The housekeeper liked her and so did the owner, and when they found she was going to have a baby they let her stay on, and she had her baby in the local maternity home. The housekeeper always believed that it was Walter's child, but the girl would not say. She did not want to get married; she wanted to be a nurse. She said that she was taking the baby home for the christening-she came from Evesham way-and she didn't come back. But the housekeeper had a letter from her long afterwards, thanking her for her goodness and telling her that the girl had realised her ambition and was a nurse. No one knows about my baby," she said, "but I have seen that he is well looked after."

She glanced at Brat. He was lying with his eyes on the ceiling, but he appeared to be listening.

"Her name was Mary Woodward. She was an even better nurse than she was a cook. She was killed during the war, taking patients

out of a ward to safety in a shelter."

There was a long silence.

"I seem to have inherited my cooking talents too," he said; and she could not tell whether the words were bitter or not.

"I was very fond of Walter. He was a dear; very kind. He had only one fault; he had no head for drink, and he liked drink very much. I don't believe for a moment that Walter knew about the girl. He was the kind who would have rushed to marry her. I think she didn't want him to know."

She had another look at Brat. Perhaps she had told him all this too soon; before he was strong enough to be interested. But she had hoped that it would give him an interest in life.

"I'm afraid that is as near as we can get, Brat. But none of us have any doubt about it. Charles took one look at you and said, 'Walter. And I think myself you look a little like your mother. That is Mary Woodward. It was taken in her second year at St. Luke's."

She gave him the photograph, and left it with him.

A week or two later she said to Eleanor: "Nell, I'm going to leave you. I've taken a lease of Tim Connell's stud at Kilbarty."

"Oh, Bee!"

"Not immediately, but when Brat is able to travel."

"You're taking Brat there? Oh, yes, of course you must go! Oh, that is a wonderful idea, Bee. It solves such a lot of problems, doesn't it? But can you afford it? Shall I lend you money for it?"

"No, Uncle Charles is doing that. Lovely to think of Charles supporting horses, isn't it? You'll need all you have to pay death duty, my dear. Mr. Sandal has broken it to the Bank that the place belonged to Simon all the time."

"What shall we do about letting people know about Brat? I mean, about his not being Patrick."

"I don't think we'll have to do anything about it. The facts will inevitably *ooze*. They always do. I think we just do nothing to prevent the leak. The fact that we are making him part of the family instead of starting prosecutions and things will take a lot of the fun out of it for the scandal-mongers. We'll survive, Nell. And so will he."

"Of course we will. And the first time someone mentions it boldly to me, I shall say: 'My cousin? Yes, he did pretend to be my brother. He *is* very like Patrick, isn't he? As if we were discussing cream-cakes. " She paused a moment and then added: "But I should like the news to get round before I'm too old to marry him."

"Are you thinking of it?" Bee said, taken aback.

"I'm set on it."

Bee hesitated; and then decided to let the future take care of itself.

"Don't worry. It will get round," she said.

"Now that Uncle Charles is here, and is going to settle down at Latchetts," she said later to Brat, "I can go back to having a life of my own somewhere else."

His eyes came away from the ceiling, and watched her.

"There's a place in Ulster I have my eye on. Tim Connell's place at Kilbarty."

She saw his fingers begin to play with the sheet, unhappily.

"Are you going away to Ulster, then?" he asked.

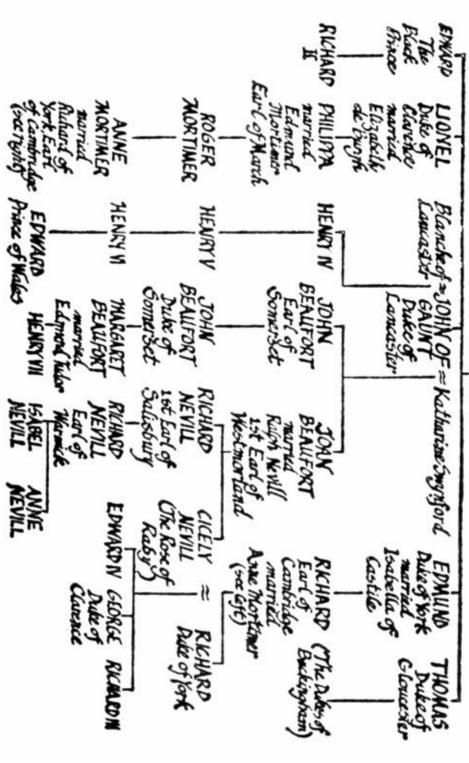
"Only if you will come with me, and run the stable for me."

The easy tears of the newly-convalescent rose in his eyes and ran down his cheek.

"Oh, Bee!" he said.

"I take it that means that my offer is accepted," she said.

EDWARD III



RALPH NEVILL 1st Earl of Westmorland

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